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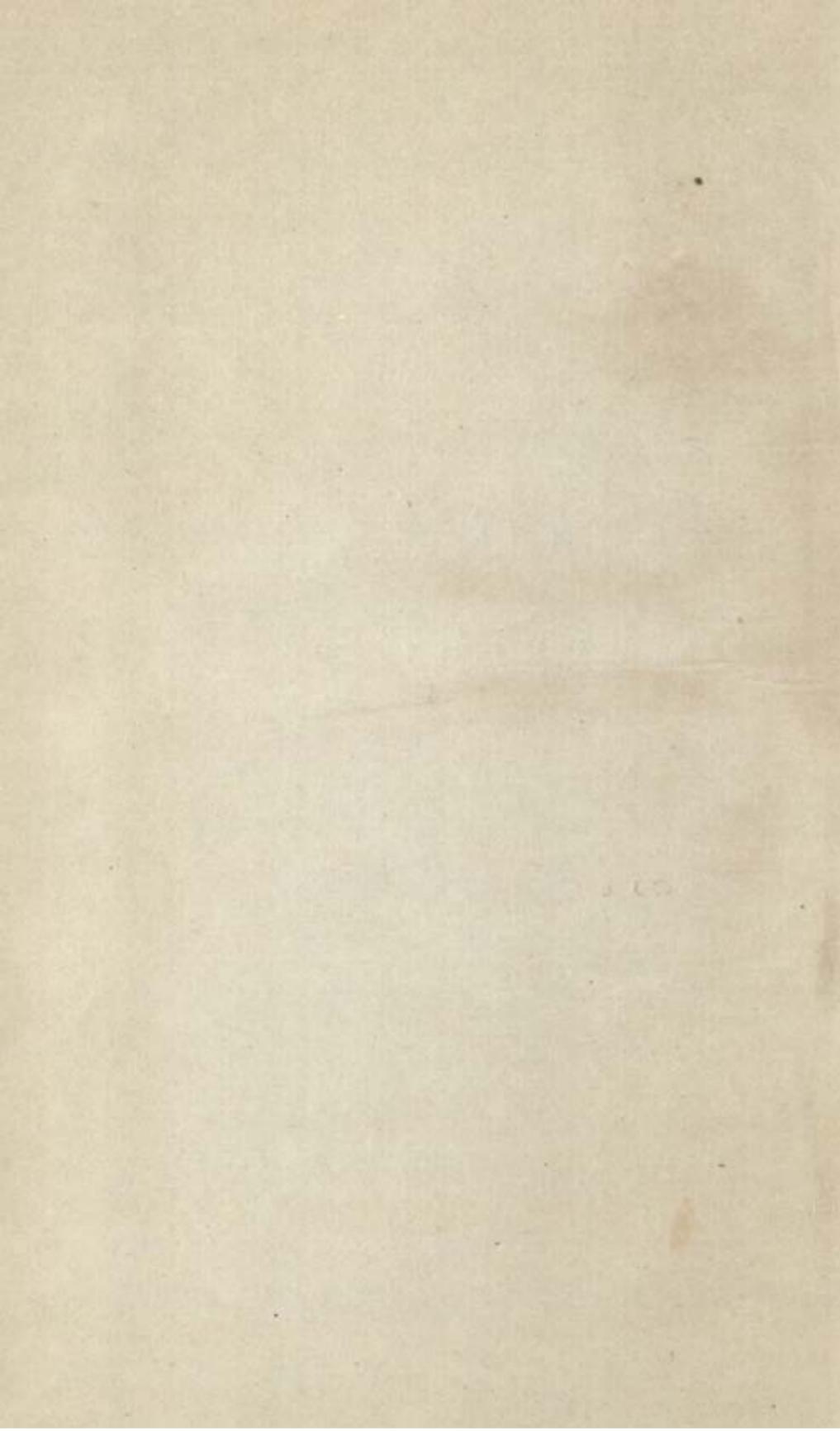
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THE
SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY
OF
SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

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BY
V. K. ARORA,
M.A., R.E.S.

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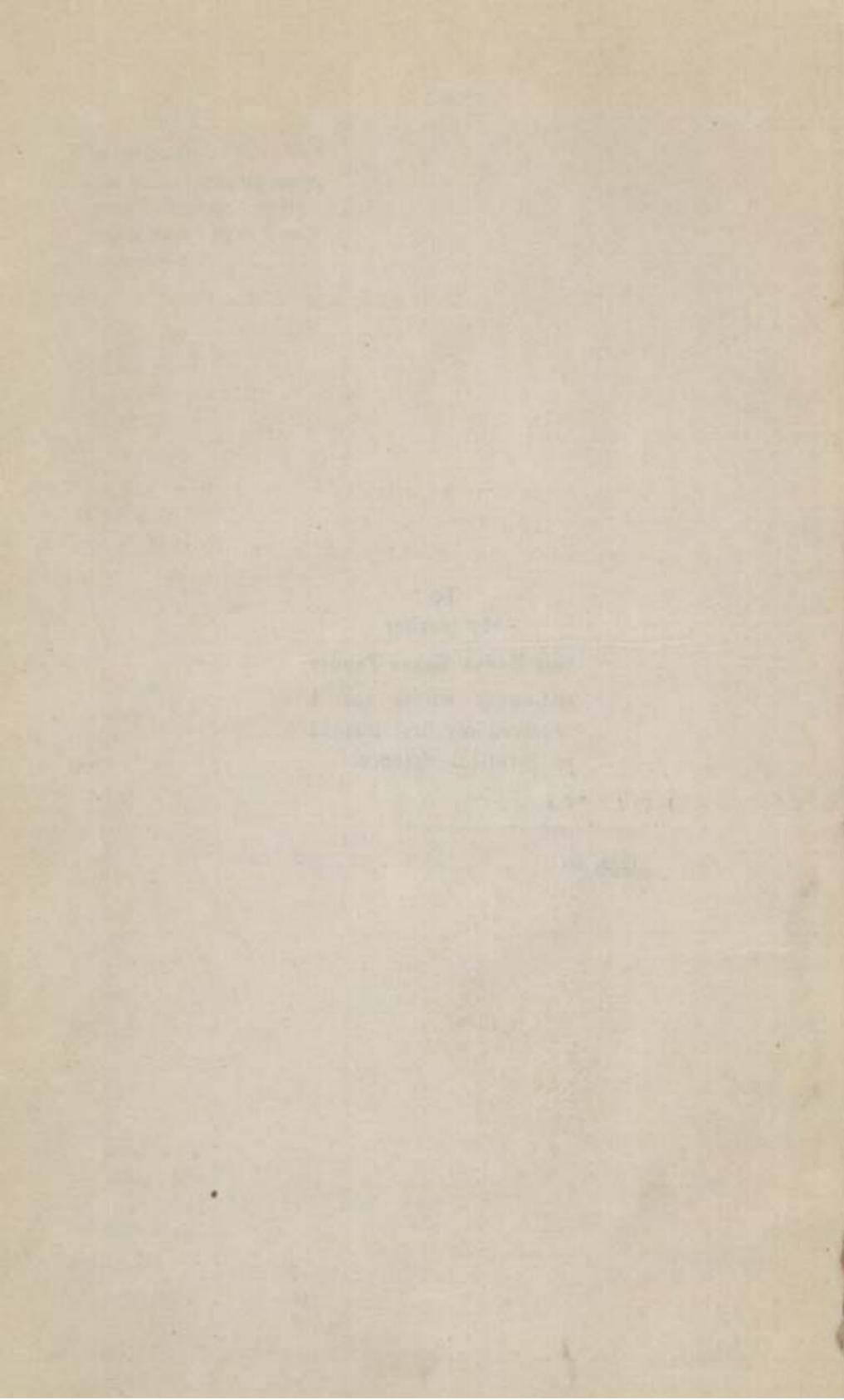
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Printed by
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To
My teacher
Shri Madan Mohan Pandey
sitting at whose feet I
received my first lessons
in Political Science.



PREFACE

Swami Vivekananda was not a social and political philosopher in the sense in which we regard Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, Marx or Gandhi. He once said : "Let no political significance be ever attached falsely to any of my writings, sayings. What nonsense !

"I will have nothing to do with nonsense. I do not believe in politics. God and truth are the only policy in the world. Everything else is trash."¹

Yet he has carved out a place for himself in the galaxy of modern Indian Political Philosophers for two reasons. First, the personality and teachings of Swami Vivekananda exercised great influence on the nationalist movement of Bengal. He was an ardent patriot whose heart was always burning with love for his motherland, his soul yearning for its liberation and his vision always aspiring to see it united. Unlike other Indian leaders of his age, who believed in the miracles of Western Civilisation, Vivekananda understood fully well the essence of freedom and democracy. "They that have money", he said, "have kept the government of the land under their thumb, are robbing and drying up all the sap out of the people, and sending them as soldiers to fight and be slain on foreign shores, so that, in case of victory their coffers may be full of gold bought by the blood of subject people on the field of battle."² "All those things that you hear about—constitutional government, freedom, liberty and parliaments—are but jokes."³ Notwithstanding the adverse circumstances his socio-economic and political views as a whole played a constructive role in the growth of the national consciousness in India, in rallying the Indian people to fight against colonialism. Secondly, he put forth most eloquently

1. Rolland, Romain : The Life and Gospel of Vivekananda ; (V Ed. 1960) Advaita Ashram, Almora, pp. 103-4

2. Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. V., pp. 364-5

3. Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. III., p. 258.

his views regarding the solution of some of the pressing problems of the country. He was one of the first to pay attention to the misfortune and sufferings of the masses. "I consider that the great national sin is the neglect of the masses and that is one of the causes of our downfall....If we want to regenerate India, we must work for them."⁴ He inspired the Indians to fight for their rights, and instilled in their hearts confidence in their own strength. Tagore wrote that he who wants to understand India must read Vivekananda for he awakens in the younger generation the devotion and love for their motherland, their pride in its past and hope for its illuminating future.

He was endowed with a prophet's vision and delivered his message unto the world. His message was not for the hour, but for the age, not for India alone, but for the whole of the world. The spirit of that message has been summarised for us by his gifted disciple 'Sister Nivedita' in a powerful passage in her 'Introduction' to the complete works of Swami Vivekananda :

"If the many and the one be indeed the same Reality, then it is not all modes of worship alone, but equally all modes of work, all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are paths of realisation. No distinction, henceforth, between sacred and secular. The labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce Life is itself religion. To have and to hold it as stern a trust as to quit and to avoid."⁵

He was a titanic intellect and possessed a mystic consciousness like Plotinus and Spinoza. It is said that he had mastered first eleven volumes of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (out of a total of twenty).⁶ Fortunately, his speeches and writings have been published in Eight Volumes by Advaita Ashram, Almora, which cover nearly four thousand pages.

4. Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. V., p. 152

5. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda (Vol. I) (XI Ed. 1962) Advaita Ashram, Almora ; p. XV

6. Cf. Varma, V. P. Modern Indian Political Thought (II ED. 1964) Laxmi Narain & Sons, Agra : p. 609

His ideas and teachings are scattered throughout his speeches and writings and cover very wide grounds ; because there is hardly any aspect of human life which he has not touched upon or elaborated in his own way.

In this book it has been my aim to present as objectively as possible, the social and political philosophy of Swami Vivekananda on the basis of his writings and utterances. The first chapter of the book deals with the life and personality of Swami Vivekananda, the second with the influences which oriented his personality. The chapters which follow these two deal critically with the social and political ideas and ideals of Swami Vivekananda. I hope readers will find it an interesting reading and will suggest me points for its further improvement.

For making the present work as correct, consistent and complete I am indebted to a number of my friends and scholars of the subject. But my greatest gratitude is due to my teacher Professor and Principal M. M. Pandey (D. B. S. College, Kanpur), who despite his pre-occupations spared much of his valuable time to go through many pages of the MSS. and render his most profound and scholarly guidance. His instructions and criticism at every stage of my work inspired me to bring the book in the present form. I am grateful to my friends—Dr. D. R. Jatava, Dr. K. S. Saxena, Prof. K. C. Gupta, Prof. A. S. Shekhon, Prof. D. C. Mishra and Sardar Jagjit Singh—who helped and gave me some valuable suggestions during the preparation of this work. My younger sister Km. Prabha Arora also helped me in this work, I am thankful to her.

Kothi Guljarbagh.
BHARATPUR (Raj.)

V. K. Arora

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theological and philosophical in character, and also with
theological, spiritual, and ethical elements and with
a spirit of broad-mindedness and tolerance and with
a spirit of inquiry and investigation.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THE EARLY PHASE :

Swami Vivekananda, whose real name was Narendra Nath¹, was born on January 12, 1863 in the famous Dutta family of Calcutta. His father Vishwa Nath Dutta was a man of deep compassion and sympathy. His mother Bhuvaneshwari Devi was exceptionally intelligent and was noted for her unusual memory and calm resignation to the will of God in all circumstances. She knew by heart many long passages from Ramayana and Mahabharata, which she read daily. The influence of mother in the formation of character and the development of the mind of Narendra Nath was very great.

1. According to the decisive witness of one of Vivekananda's most important monastic disciples (Swami Shuddhananda), Narendra Nath Dutta did not adopt the name of Vivekananda until the moment of his departure for America in 1893. Even Shri Ramakrishna always used his name Narendra, or more shortly, Naren. Ramakrishna never gave monastic names to his disciples. He had indeed given Naren the cognomen of 'Kamalaksha' (lotus eyed), but Naren dropped it immediately. During his first journey in India he appeared under different names. Sometime he was Swami Vidishananda and sometimes Satchidananda. When he went to ask Colonel Olcott, the then, President of the Theosophical Society, for letters of introduction to America, it was under the name of Satchidananda that Colonel Olcott knew him, and instead of recommending him to his friends in America, warned them against him. It was his great friend, the Maharaja of Khetri, who suggested the name of Vivekananda to him when he was about to go to America. The choice of the name was inspired by an allusion to the "power of discrimination" possessed by Naren. Naren accepted it, perhaps provisionally, but he could never have changed it, even if he had wanted to; for within a few months it had acquired an Indo-American celebrity.

His early education began in a liberal religious atmosphere where his mother taught him elementary Bengali and English and told him many tales from Mahabharata and Ramayana. His boyish imagination was captivated by the life of Rama and whenever there was Ramayana to be read in the neighbourhood, he was always there. "Sometimes he was so rapt in the thrilling episodes of Rama's life that he forgot all about home. Naren—as he was now called liked to play at meditation. Though it was play, sometimes it awakened in him deep spiritual emotions which made him unconscious of the outer world. One day he lost himself so much in the mimic meditation in a secluded corner of the house that his relatives had to force open the door and shake him to bring him back to normal consciousness."²

From his early childhood to death this mystical temperament was an apparent feature of his character. "Naren would also have a peculiar experience when he would try to go to sleep. As soon as he closed his eyes there appeared between his eyebrows a wonderful spot of light of changing colours, which would expand and burst and bathe his whole body with a flood of white radiance. As the mind became pre-occupied with this phenomenon, the body would fall asleep. It was a regular occurrence with him, and Narendra Nath thought this phenomenon was natural with everybody. But it indicated his great spiritual potentiality."³

There was, however, another side of his character. As a child he was very naughty and hard to control. At times he teased his sisters and mother very much. Referring to this, his mother used to say, "I prayed to Shiva for a son and he has sent me one of his demons."⁴ Among the servants the coachman was his special friend, and one of his ambitions of the childhood was to become a coachman.

2. Tejasananda : A Short life of Swami Vevekananda : Advaita Ashram, 5 Dehi, Entally Road, Calcutta-14. (VIII Edition 1962) p. 3

3. *Ibid.*, p. 3

4. *Ibid.*, p. 4

At the age of six, Naren was sent to 'Pathshala' where in a year he learned by heart almost the whole of *Mughdhabodha*, a Sanskrit grammar, as well as long passages from *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. He was an intellectual prodigy whose memory was exceptionally sharp. At seven Naren joined the Metropoliton institution of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar where his exceptional intelligence was at once acknowledged by his teachers and class-fellows. Physically too he was well-built and was a fine sportsman of his time. In this institution Naren made much advance in knowledge. He mastered many standard works of English, Bengali literature and Indian History. Even while in the Entrance class he acquired a supernatural power of reading which he described as follows : "It so happened that I could understand an author without reading his book line by line. I could get the meaning by just reading the first and the last line of a paragraph. As this power developed I found it unnecessary to read even the paragraphs. I could follow by reading only the first and last lines of a page. Further, where the author introduced discussion to explain a matter and it took him four or five or even more pages to clear the subject, I could grasp the whole trend of his argument by only reading the first few lines".⁵

After passing the Entrance Examination in first division, he first studied at the Presidency College and then joined the General Assembly's Institution. Here he attracted the attention of both Indian and British professors who were astounded by his brilliance. Principal W. W. Hastie once said, "I have travelled far and wide but I have never yet come across a lad of such talents and possibilities. He is bound to make his mark in life".⁶ His studies were not limited to college curriculum. He studied thoroughly English Literature, European History, Western Philosophy, Science, Art, music and Medicine. He read Spencer, Mill, Kant, Schopenhauer and Comte. Intellectually, therefore, he was a versatile genius.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10

6. *Ibid.*, p. 10

COMMUNION WITH BRAHMO SAMAJ :

It was the period when famous Brahmo leader, Keshab Chandra Sen, was exercising deep influence on young Bengali intellectuals. Narendra Nath was also captivated by his writings and lectures. He began to take interest in the activities of Brahmo Movement and afterwards became a member of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj.

"The Brahmo Samaj was not a political movement but its rationalism, its universalism, its concept of the religion of humanity, and its ideal of synthesis of the East and West, prepared the intellectual foundations for future national movements. It was a deeply individualistic protest and signified the rise of individual reason, heart and conscious against what, is considered, degrading and barbarizing customs. Thus the Brahmo Samaj was akin to the movement of rationalistic enlightenment and free thought in Europe".⁷

The Brahmo Samaj protested against certain tenets of Hinduism, such as polytheism, image worship, Divine Incarnation and the need of a Guru (Spiritual Guide). As an alternative it offered a monotheistic religion which repudiated all these. "On the social side it stood for reforms in the way of breaking up to the caste system and the caste consciousness, the recognition of the equality of man, the education and emancipation of women, and so on".⁸

For a time the intellectual atmosphere of Brahmo Samaj satisfied Narendra. He began to consider it as an ideal institution for solving all problems of life, whether national or individual. He chafed under caste rigidity and had no sympathy with polytheism and idol worship. He espoused the cause of Samaj with all earnestness, and felt uplifted during its prayers and devotional songs. But he could not get what he actually wanted. His mission was :

7. Varma, V.P. Modern Indian Political Thought, Laxmi Narain Agarwal, Agra (IIEd, 1964). p. 39

8. Tejasananda, op. cit., p. 13.

‘यं लब्धवा चापरं लाभं, मन्येत नाधिकं ततः ।
यस्मिन् स्थितो न दुःखेन, गृहणापि विचाल्येत्—”

—गीता ६।२२

(Where he holds no other gain greater than that which he has gained ; and where securely seated ; he is not shaken by any calamity however great).

Soon he started feeling that if God was to be realised, he was no nearer the goal than where he was before joining it. What were philosophies and Vedas but attempts to describe the Indescribable ? They were useless if they fail to bring one to the feet of God.

In his longing to know the truth he approached the great spiritual Brahmo Leader, Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore. Tense with excitement Naren burst out with question : “Sir, have you seen God ?” Maharshi was startled. Mad in his spiritual quest he went to the leaders of other religious sects, one after another, but none could give him a satisfactory answer.

MEETING WITH RAMAKRISHNA :

While Naren was thus victim to the conflict of his own thoughts—there lived one whom people knew as Sri Ramakrishna and whose spiritual life was just antithesis of that of him. Ramakrishna had scarcely any secular learning. He was a priest in the temple of ‘Goddess Kali’ at Dakshineshwar. By his sincerity and intense ‘Sadhna’ he had realised a living presence in the image of ‘Kali’. “Afterwards he performed spiritual practices as advocated by almost all schools of Hindu thought, and his life covered, as it were, the whole gamut of Hinduism. Not content with this he practised other religions also and came to the direct conclusion that all religions pointed to the same goal. Afterwards he lived a life more in tune with God than with the external world”.

Naren had once heard about Ramakrishna from Principal Hastic. In order to know whether Ramakrishna had the direct experience of God he went to Dakshineswar to meet him. His meeting with Ramakrishna was a turning point in his life. When he met Ramakrishna the latter immediately recognised his spiritual potentialities and exclaimed, "Lord, I know you are that ancient Sage Nara, the Incarnation of Narayana born on earth to remove the miseries of mankind".¹⁰ "I was taken aback by his conduct," wrote Narendra later, "I thought he must be stark mad".¹¹ The sceptic Narendra put him the question, "Sir, have you seen God?" "Yes I see Him just as I see you here"—came the reply. The answer impressed Narendra but he could not reconcile it to his monomaniac behaviour. After few more meetings, however, the sceptic and obstinate Naren had passed away and a new Narendra Nath was born. "He recognised Sri Ramakrishna as a great spiritual personality, but his mind was not ready fully to accept him as a Guru. His mental make up as well as his associations with the Brahmosamaj prevented him from believing in the necessity of a Guru. How could a man, however great, be an unerring guide? So he would not accept any word without testing it by his own experience or reason".¹²

While Narendra was prey to this mental conflict, an unexpected trouble came to him. His father who was the only supporter of the family suddenly died of heart disease. It was 1884. Vishwa Nath Dutta had spent more than he had earned. Consequently his death caused dire poverty to his family. The burden of supporting the family fell upon Narendra's shoulders. He had passed B.A. Examination and was studying Law. The son of a rich father, he was now the poorest of the poor in the college. Even shoes became a

10. Life of Vivekananda : Eastern and Western disciples : Advaita, Almora, (VI. Ed. 1960), p. 46

11. Ibid., p. 46

12. Tejasananda : op. cit. p. 19

luxury, his garments were of the coarsest cloth, and many times he went to his classes without food".¹³ The creditors started knocking at his door. His relatives for whom his father had done so much, in his life-time, became enemies and even threatened to oust the family from the home. He tried to find employment but misfortune did not allow him the same. For a time his faith in God too was undermined when the words of Vidyasagar,¹⁴ "if God is good and generous why then do millions of people die for want of a few morsels of food",¹⁵ flashed in his mind. But soon his heart was filled with regret for cherishing such unconventional notion. He thought, "God is definite, and definite is the way to search Him out. Otherwise what is the significance of existence? Despite all the suffering and pain, the way to realise God has to be found".¹⁶

TRANSFORMATION :

Then came the greatest moment of Naren's Sadhana, the very crest and glory of his spiritual realisations. "This warrior and conqueror wanted to have everything, both God and the world—to dominate everything—to renounce every-

13. *Ibid.*, p. 22

14. Vidyasagar : known as Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-91), was a social reformer, Director of Sanskrit College, Calcutta. He had witnessed the famine of 1864 in which about 1,00,000 people had died of starvation. The famine made him to reject God, and devote himself wholly to the service of man. Vivekananda in 1898 spoke of him, without a word of blame, during a journey in Kashmir, as was noted down by Sister Nivedita in her account of conversations with the Swami (Notes on some wanderings with Swami Vivekananda. Udbodhan Office, Calcutta).

15. Translated into English from original Hindi from the book of Apurvananda, Swami : 'Yugpravartak Vivekananda' : Jayanti Prakashan, 163, Lower Circular Road, Calcutta-14, p. 62

16. *Ibid.*, p. 63

thing".¹⁷ He was pining for a vision of the Absolute. He prayed to feel Divinity. To lose the 'I' in the vastness of consciousness. Long did he pray to his master, Ramakrishna, for this realisation. One day his Master declared :

"The day when Naren comes in contact with suffering and misery the pride of his character will melt into a mood of infinite compassion. His strong faith in himself will be an instrument to re-establish in discouraged souls the confidence and faith they have lost. And the freedom of his conduct, based on mighty self-mastery, will shine brightly in the eyes of others as a manifestation of the true liberty of the Ego".¹⁸

"This meeting with suffering and human misery not only vague and general—but definite misery, misery close at hand the misery of his people, the misery of India was to be the flint upon the steel, whence a spark would fly to set the whole soul on fire".¹⁹ And with this as its foundation stone, pride, ambition and love, faith, science and action, all his powers and all his desires were thrown into the mission of human service and united into one single flame : "A religion which will give us faith in ourselves, a national self-respect, and the power to feed and educate the poor and relieve the misery around me...If you want to find God serve man".²⁰

Naren's faith in the Master, and the new vision now took him to the heights after heights in spirituality. At the feet of his Master he learnt Vedanta and means to attain Nirvikalpa Samadhi. To him, Ramakrishna unfolded the mystic secrets of ancient wisdom, him he charged with the responsibility of looking after the spiritual elevation of his disciples, to him he entrusted the task of serving the suffering humanity.

In the middle of 1885, Ramakrishna showed the first symptom of a throat trouble which ultimately ended in the

17. Rolland, Romain., *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel* : Advaita Ashrama, 4, Wellington Lane, Calcutta-13, (V. Ed. 1960), p. 9

18. Quoted from the work of Sardananda : *Divya Bhava*.

19. Rolland, Romain., *op. cit.*, p. 10

20. *Ibid.*, p. 10

fatal cancer. At the time of his departure from the world, Ramakrishna touched Narendra and made him experience the bliss of 'Nirvikalpa Samadhi',²¹ which Naren had yearned for, but he forbade him to enter into it unless he fulfilled his mission".²²

The result of the meeting, contacts and relationship of Narendra with Ramakrishna was far-reaching. The Master remained a meek servant of God, the disciple became a leader of humanity. To 'Jnana' was added 'Bhakti', to 'Vairagya' was added 'Karma'.

THE WANDERING MONK :

Before his passing away, Sri Ramakrishna had formed an Order of monks out of his young disciples with Narendra as their leader. "The Order had taken on itself the responsibility to protect and to enhance the deep spirituality and the spirit of universality which had found such a glowing expression in the life of the master".²³ Narendra now added to the inward spiritual life of the Order an outward programme of humanitarian and cultural activities in which the order sought the cooperation of laymen also. "These two inseparable aspects of the movement initiated by him in the name of his Master became the Ramakrishna Math (Monastery) and the Ramakrishna Mission with their headquarters just outside Calcutta at Belur Math, near Howrah, West Bengal. He gave the movement the inspiring motto ; 'Atmano Mokasarthan jagad-

21. The final stage in the practice of Yoga in which individuality is given up while merging with the object of meditation, thus producing a state of unqualified blissfulness and unperturbed consciousness.

22. In the words of Ramakrishna, "just as a treasure is locked up in a box, so will this realisation have just had to be locked up and the key shall remain with me, when you have finished my work the treasure will be unlocked again," quoted in Life of Vivekananda : op. cit., p. 144

23. Ranganathananda : Swami Vivekananda : His life and Mission: The Ramakrishna Mission, Institute of Culture, Calcutta, pp. 13 14

dhitaya ca'—'for the freedom of the self and the welfare of the world'.²⁴

If his soul yearned for communion with God, his mind became restless for the service of humanity. From now onwards, he became the wandering monk and travelled throughout the length and breadth of India. Without a companion, without a name, staff and bowl in hand, as an unknown beggar Naren left Calcutta in 1888. He went through Varanasi, Ayodhya, Lucknow, Agra, Vrindaban, Hathras and the Himalayas. Nothing is known of his journey or of the subsequent ones except from the memories of the brethren who met or accompanied him. At the railway station of Hathras he quite unintentionally made Sharat Chandra Gupta, Station Master of Hathras, his disciple, who afterwards took the name of Sadananda. Sharat Chandra was so much impressed by Naren that he left his home and followed him, without any hesitation, in his intineracy through the hills. They went about in the guise of beggars, often repulsed, at times almost dying of hunger and thirst, with no regard for caste and willing to smoke even the pipe of the pariah. "For sometime both were lost in the silence of Himalayas and were almost dead to the outside world".²⁵ But physical hardship and many other factors compelled them to return to Baranagore monastery after some time.

"This very first journey had brought ancient India vividly before his eyes, eternal India, the India of the Vedas, with its race of heroes and Gods, clothed in the glory of legend and history, Aryans, Moguls and Dravidians all one. At the first impact he realised the spiritual unity of India and Asia, and he communicated this discovery to the brethren of Baranagore".²⁶

After a year he again went out and visited many places including Ghazipur and Varanasi. From this journey he

24. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

25. Tejasananda : *op. cit.*, p. 32.

26. Rolland, Romain., *op. cit.*, p. 17.

"brought back some intuition of the Gospel of Humanity, which the new democracies of the West were writing unconsciously and blindly".²⁷ He told his brethren how in the West the ancient ideal of divine right, which had been formerly the appanage of one single being, had been gradually recognised as the property of all without distinction of class, and that the human spirit thus came to a perception of the divinity of Nature and of Unity. He saw and immediately proclaimed the necessity of introducing into India the same ideas which had been tried by America and Europe with such happy results. Thus from the first he exhibited the freedom and greatness of spirit, that seeks and desired the common good, the spiritual progress of all men by the united efforts of all men".²⁸

In February 1891, he began his historic wandering of two years through India. In the course of this pilgrimage round India he "obtained first hand experience of the glory and greatness that was India in the past, saw with his own eyes the degrading condition of India sunk in ignorance, poverty and disease, and chalked out a programme of regenerating, uplifting and improving the condition of the masses for the glorious future of India".²⁹

First he visited Rajputana, thereafter, he went to Bombay and southern India till at last he reached Rameshwaram and next journeyed on to Kanyakumari where his eventful pilgrimage came to an end, while at Khandwa he heard about the Parliament of Religions which was to be held at Chicago in America in 1893. He decided to attend the same. The most striking element in all this wandering was his tireless search for unity in world of Indian ideals." He finally realised that underlying all the diversity of customs and traditions was the unbroken oneness of the spiritual vision, and India,

27. *Ibid.*, p. 17

28. *Ibid.*, p. 17

29. Varma, R. P., Swami Vivekananda—The Practical Vedantin : An article published in the Political Science Review : Department of Political Science, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur : Vol. II. No. I (March 1963) p. 2

though fallen and degraded, still possessed the vitality to rise once again to her pristine position of greatness. His long wandering brought him face to face with the dreadful poverty of his countrymen and made him poignantly feel the truth of the Master's words, "Religion is not for empty bellies".³⁰ When perchance he met his two brother disciples at Abu Road Railway Station he said to them, "I have travelled all over India. But alas, it was agony to me, my brothers, to see with my own eyes the terrible poverty and misery of the masses, and I could not restrain my tears. It is now my firm conviction that it is futile to preach religion amongst them without first trying to remove their poverty and their sufferings. It is for this reason—to find more means for the salvation of the poor of India—that I am now going to America".³¹

But before leaving for America, he visited Khetri. It was at the court of Maharaja of Khetri, his disciple, that Narendra, at his request, assumed the name of Swami Vivekananda by which he was to be known in future.

JOURNEY TO THE WEST :

Swami Vivekananda left "Bombay on May 31, 1893".³² He reached Chicago in the middle of July by way of Ceylon, Penang, Singapore, Hongkong, Canton, and Nagasaki. This voyage provided for him a unique opportunity to gather new experiences in life. In China he was struck to find Sanskrit manuscripts. In Japan he found inscription of Sanskrit Mantras (Sacred texts) in the temples. This confirmed his hypothesis of the spiritual unity of Asia and he became convinced that ancient India did exercise the religious influence over the Empires of Far East.

Chicago at first sight surprised and stupefied him. "He had never imagined the power, the riches, the inventive genius of the Western World. Being of a stronger vitality and more

30. Tejasananda ; op. cit., p. 38

31. Ibid., p. 39

32. Ibid., p. 40

sensitive to the appeal of force than a Tagore or a Gandhi, who were oppressed by the frenzy of movement and noise, by the whole European-American (especially American) mechanism, Vivekananda was at his ease in it at least at first he succumbed to its exciting intoxication, and his first feeling was of juvenile acceptance ; his admiration knew no bounds".³³

After twelve days of his arrival at Chicago he went to the Information Bureau of the Exposition. But was shocked to learn that the Parliament would not open until after the first week of September, that it was too late for the registration of delegates, and that no registration would be accepted without official references. He had none, he was unknown, without credentials from any recognised group and his purse too did not allow him to wait. He cabled to his friends in Madras for help and applied to an official religious Society to appoint him as one of its delegates. "But official societies do not forgive independence. The chief of the society sent this reply : 'Let the devil die of cold'."³⁴

But the devil neither died nor gave up. He never passed anywhere unnoticed, but fascinated even while he was unknown. In the Boston train his personality struck a fellow traveller—a rich lady from Massachusetts—who invited him to her house and "introduced him to Professor J. H. Wright, of the Greek department in Harvard University".³⁵ Professor Wright was deeply impressed by his knowledge and insisted that Vivekananda should represent Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions. He "Wrote at once to his friend, Dr. Barrows, the Chairman of the Committee on the selection of delegates, stating 'Here is a man who is more learned than all our learned professors put together'".³⁶ He also offered him a railway ticket to Chicago and letters of recommendation to the committee for finding lodging.

33. Rolland, Romain., *op. cit.*, p. 34

34. *Ibid.*, p. 35

35. Tejasananda : *op. cit.*, p. 43

36. *Ibid.*, p. 43

Vivekananda returned to Chicago but lost the address of the Committee in journey. He did not know where to go but once more fate found for him one who was later numbered among his most faithful American followers".³⁷ She took him to the Parliament where he was gladly accepted as a delegate and was given lodging with the other Oriental delegates.

IN THE PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS :

On Monday, September 11, 1893, the first session of the Parliament of Religions was opened in the great Hall of Columbus. In the Centre sat Cardinal Gibbons, the highest prelate of the Roman Catholic Church. Around him were gathered the Oriental delegates—P. C. Majumdar and Nagarkar representing Brahmo Samaj, Dharmapala from Ceylon representing Buddhism, Gandhi (a distant relation of Mahatma Gandhi) representing Jainism and Chakravarty with Annie Besant representing Theosophical Society. "But amongst them all it was the youngman who represented nothing—and everything—the man belonging to no sect, but rather to India as a whole, who drew the glance of the assembled thousands".³⁸ It was the first time that he had to speak before such an august assembly.

In the late afternoon, Chairman asked Swami to deliver his talk. Hardly had he pronounced the very simple opening words, "Sisters and Brothers of America," hundreds rose to their feet and applauded. He was the first to cast off the formalism of congress and speak to the audience in the language for which they were really waiting. After greeting the youngest of the nations in the name of the ancient monastic order in the world, Swami Vivekananda presented Hinduism as the mother of religions—a religion which had taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. He quoted two beautiful passages from the scriptures of Hinduism :

37. Mrs. G. W. Hale.

38. Rolland, Romain : op. cit., p. 37

"Whoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him" "All men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to me".

Each of the other orators had spoken of his God, or the God of his sect. He—he alone—spoke of all their Gods, and embraced them all in the universal being. It was the breath of Ramakrishna, breaking down the barriers through the mouth of his great disciple.³⁹ During the ensuing days he spoke again about a dozen times.⁴⁰ The effect of his mighty words was immense. He got universal fame. 'The New York Herald' acknowledged him as "Undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions," and added, "After hearing him we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation".⁴¹

But even in the midst of this universal recognition Vivekananda was never forgetful of his duty—the duty to uplift the sunken masses of India by widening his appeal until it became the cause of the people, the cause of the poor and the oppressed of the whole world."

In order to fulfil his mission he accepted the offer of a lecture bureau for a tour of the United States. As a teacher he made a deep impression upon the minds of the American intelligentsia. He was offered the chair of Oriental Philosophy at Harvard and the chair of Sanskrit at Columbia but he declined on the ground that he was a 'Sannyasin.'

IN ENGLAND :

After closing his teaching work in Thousand Island Park Swami Vivekananda sailed for England on August 7, 1895. In one of his letters to his friend Legget in America he wrote, "The British Empire with all its drawbacks is the greatest

39. *Ibid.*, p. 38

40. His Principal dissertations were on the following subjects; Why We Disagree (Sept. 15, 1893), On Hinduism (Sept. 19, 1893), Religion Not the Crying Need of India (Sept. 20, 1893), The Essence of Hindu Religion (Sept. 25, 1893), Buddhism, the Fulfilment of Hinduism (Sept. 26, 1893)

41. Quoted by Tejasananda : *op. cit.*, p. 49

machine that ever existed for the dissemination of ideas. I mean to put my ideas in the centre of this machine and they will spread all over the world"⁴² The press in England "compared him with Ram Mohan Roy and Keshab Chandra Sen, and even with Buddha. Even heads of some Churches welcomed him ; Swamiji was also invited to give discourse in the drawing rooms of fashionable ladies. It was in one of these select gatherings that he first met Miss Margaret E. Nobel, who afterwards became one of his most notable disciples. Swamiji gave her the name Nivedita (the Dedicated) and never was a name more justified by action. For, Sister Nivedita, as she was known in India, devoted many years of her life to the noble cause of the uplift of women and other social works".⁴³

In London Swami Vivekananda opened regular classes of Vedantic teaching. His lectures on Jnana-Yoga—the path of wisdom—made direct appeal to the intellectuals of England and created the atmosphere conducive for the spread of Hindu thought and culture in the purest form. In America he had found the public most enthusiastic and responsive in taking up new ideas ; but in London he discovered that though Englishmen were more conservative in their praise and declaration of acceptance, yet they were comparatively more fervent and staunch once they had convinced themselves of the worth of a teacher and his ideas.

FOUNDATION OF THE VEDANTA SOCIETY :

Swami Vivekananda made some necessary arrangements for continuing his work in England and returned to New-York on December 6, 1895. There he gave a series of lectures on work as spiritual discipline which were later published as 'Karma-Yoga'. His talks on love as spiritual discipline were also published as 'Bhakti-Yoga'.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 59

43. Majumdar : Swami Vivekananda ; A Historical Review, General Printers and Publishers Private Limited, Calcutta-13. (1965) ; pp. 56-57.

For teaching the fundamental principles of Hinduism he planned to set up a permanent organisation in America. He wanted that there should be free exchange of ideas between the East and the West for the development of both. It was his firm conviction that the technological advancement of the West and the spiritualism of the East must shake their hands with each other; because in the ultimate analysis the two reach at a place where humanity stands as one indivisible entity. He felt that science mixed with Vedanta was the ideal of future humanity. He was conscious that so long Hinduism would not be interpreted in most rationalistic and scientific way it would not be acceptable to the Western world. He, therefore, realised the necessity of a thorough reorganisation of the religio-philosophical thought of India if it was to emerge as a conquering force and penetrate into the core of the Western life.

He also planned of bringing some of his monastic brother disciples from India to impart religious teachings to the Western people and of sending in return some of his trained and devout Western disciples to India to give practical training in technology and applied sociology to the Indians. In New-York Vivekananda's life was a glaring example of austere habits and strict discipline as he played the role of a Yogi to inspire in his followers the feeling for leading a life of spiritual culture. This resulted in bringing about a wonderful transformation in the lives of many persons who came within the range of his spiritual influence. Miss S. E. Waldo who later became one of his foremost disciples and adopted the name of sister Haridasi gives a pen-picture of how Swami Vivekananda carried on his spiritual performance patiently and calmly for the benefit of those who came to attend his class-talks. She writes that "a few of those who had heard him in Brooklyn now began to go to the place where he lived in New-York.....The Swami himself sat on the floor and most of his audience likewise.....The door was left open and the overflow filled the hall and sat on the stair....The Swami so dignified yet so simple, so gravely earnest, so eloquent and the close rank of students, forgetting all inconveniences,

hanging breathless on his every word "...It was a fit beginning for a movement that has since grown to such grand proportions. In this unpretentious way did Swami Vivekananda inaugurate the work of teaching Vedanta philosophy in New-York. The Swami gave his services free as air....The classes were held nearly every morning and on several evenings in every week. Some Sunday lectures were also given and there were 'question' classes to help those to whom the teaching was so new and strange that they were desirous to have an opportunity for more extended explanation." In this way the idea of Vedanta in practice was established in the land of America.^{43a}

In February 1896 Swami Vivekananda laid the foundation of the famous *Vedanta Society of New-York*. In the words of Dr. Majumdar, "it marks the beginning of that systematic and organised preaching of Hinduism in America which is one of the most outstanding achievements of Svaniji. Svaniji's reputation was now established on a sound basis even in learned circles in America. The Harvard University, the biggest and most famous in the U.S.A., invited him to deliver a lecture on the philosophy of Vedanta to its Graduate Students of the Department of Philosophy. This lecture, delivered on 25 March, 1896, created such an impression that he was offered the chair of Eastern Philosophy in the University. He declined this as well as a similar offer from the Columbia University, on the ground that he was a *Sannyasin*."^{43a}

While "Surveying the history of his work one sees Swami Vivekananda moving through the West as some mighty, glorious and effulgent light. A Plato in thought, a modern Savonarola in his fearless outspokenness, and adored as a Master and as a prophet, the Swami moved amongst his disciples as some great Bodhisattva amongst his devotees. Some looked upon him even as a Buddha, others as a Christ, some as a Rishi of the Upanishads, whilst others as a Sankaracharya; and all regarded him as the embodiment of the Highest consciousness...the Swami Vivekananda lives in the memory of America as the Man with a Message for the West, 'one who walked with God.'"⁴⁴

SECOND VISIT TO ENGLAND :

While in United States of America Swami Vivekananda was not worried by his financial difficulties because a good number of prosperous and "wealthy Americans invited him to their houses and entertained him with lavish hospitality."⁴⁴ He was receiving

^{43a.} *Ibid.*, pp. 58-9.

* *Life*, Mayavati (2nd Edn.), Vol. I, p. 502.

earnest appeals from England to return and resume his activities. He came back to England in April 1896. "From the beginning of May he conducted five classes a week and a Friday session for open discussion. He gave a series of three Sunday lectures in one of the galleries of the Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colours, in Piccadilly, and also lectured at Princes' Hall and the lodge of Annie Besant, in addition to speaking at many clubs, and in educational institutions and drawing rooms. His audience consisted mostly of intellectual and serious minded people. His speeches on 'Jnana-Yoga,' containing the essence of the Vedanta philosophy, were mostly given in England. Canon Wilberforce held a reception in the Swami's honour, to which he invited many distinguished people."⁴⁵

The renowned philosopher, Max Muller, also invited Swami Vivekananda to lunch with him in Oxford. Max Muller had already been deeply impressed by the life and teachings of Ramakrishna and was anxious to meet his disciple. Max Muller wanted to write a book on the life and teachings of Ramakrishna. On the basis of material available to him and his personal talks with Vivekananda, the great Orientalist wrote his famous book, 'Ramakrishna, His Life and Sayings.'

Exhausted with the strenuous exertions of his London work, the Swami accepted an invitation of holiday tour from his friends in Switzerland. He enjoyed the stillness and freshness of the mountain retreat in Switzerland very much. In August 1891, he received an invitation from the celebrated Indologist, Paul Deussen, Professor of philosophy at the University of Kiel, Germany. After discussions on Vedanta with Swami Vivekananda the German philosopher said, "It

44. *Ibid.*, p. 50

45. Nikhilananda : Vivekananda : A Biography : New York 1953. p. 99

46. Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Vol. Ed. R.C. Majumdar, Published by Swami Vivekananda Centenary Committee, Calcutta (1963) pp. 112-3

seems that a movement is being made back towards the fountain head of spirituality, a movement that will in the future, probably make India the spiritual leader of the nations, the highest and greatest spiritual influence on earth."⁴⁶ When Vivekananda returned to London, Professor Deussen accompanied him and held many more discussions on Vedanta.

In London Swami Vivekananda stayed for only two months. Thereafter he left for India accompanied by his two western disciples Mr. and Mrs. Sevier, who wanted to lead the life of ascetic retirement (Vanaprastha) in India. They had disposed of all their properties and had placed the sale-proceeds at the disposal of Swami Vivekananda.

THE HOME COMING

The home-coming of Swami Vivekananda was a great event in the history of modern India. "He received a tumultuous ovation from the Indians such as an emperor or a victorious general might envy".⁴⁷ "All India looked to him as to some mighty Acharya of old, born again to revivify the fading glories of the Eternal Religion and to carry her banner throughout the whole civilized world...through the study of the Swami's lectures and utterances, the eyes of the educated Indian were opened to the hidden beauties and treasures of their religion, and they came more and more to see how Vedanta alone could claim the supreme position of being a Universal religion".⁴⁸

The Monastic Order which he himself had set up after the passing away of his master occupied the first attention of Swami Vivekananda. He wanted to carry into practice what he had so long preached, "by making the monks devote themselves to an active life of service for the masses and thus to make the monastic organization a potent instrument for social and national regeneration, by spreading education among the

47. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 65

48. Tejasananda : *op. cit.*, p. 66

illiterate, helping them fight against poverty and disease, removing the social evils and iniquities and raising them to a higher level of morality".⁴⁹

For giving it a concrete shape he called a meeting of the disciples of Shri Ramakrishna at the house of Sri Balaram Bose at Baghbazar on May 1, 1897. He discussed the necessity of establishing an Association to solve the major problems of Indian life, viz., liquidation of illiteracy, rural reconstruction, work among the labouring and backward classes, economic and social uplift of the people, removal of untouchability, female education, relief works, preservation of indigenous culture, dissemination of accumulated spiritual wisdom of the race and the evolution of a cultural synthesis. He asked for the co-operation of the assembled members and then added his personal suggestions regarding its administration. He declared that "in a country like India.....it would be wise to form an organization on a democratic basis, where each member had an equal voice and decisions were made according to the vote of the majority. Democratic principles could be followed later, when, with the spread of education, people would learn to sacrifice individual interests and personal prejudices for the public weal. Therefore,... the organization for the time being should be under the leadership of a dictator, whose authority everybody must obey. In the fullness of time, it would come to be guided by the opinion and consent of others. Moreover, he himself was only acting in the capacity of a servant of the common Master, as were they all."⁵⁰ The meeting enthusiastically approved of Swami Vivekananda's proposal and adopted unanimously the following aims and objects of the Association in the subsequent meeting held on May 5, 1897.

1. The Association (Sangha) shall be known as the Ramakrishna Mission.

49. Majumdar : *op. cit.*, p. 66

50. Nikhilananda, pp. 125-6

2. (a) This new Mission is to preach the truths which Sri Ramakrishna has, for the good of humanity, preached and demonstrated by practical application in his own life, and to help others to put these truths into practice in their lives for their temporal, mental and spiritual advancement ;

(b) to conduct the activities of the movement for the establishment of fellowship among the followers of different religions, knowing them all to be so many forms only of one underlying Eternal Religion.

3. Its methods of action are :

(a) to train men so as to make them competent to teach such knowledge or sciences as are conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses,

(b) to promote and encourage arts and industries, and

(c) to introduce and spread among the people in general Vedantic and other religious ideas in the way in which they are elucidated in the life of Sri Ramakrishna.

4. It should have two branches of action :

(a) Indian Work Department and

(b) Foreign Department.

(a) The activities of the Indian Department should be directed to the establishment of Maths and Ashrams in different parts of India for the training of Sannyasins and such of the householders as may be willing to devote their lives to the teaching of others ;

(b) Whereas its work in the Foreign Department should be to send trained members of the Order to countries outside India to start centres there for the preaching of Vedanta in order to bring about a closer relation and better understanding between India and foreign countries.

5. The aims and the objects of the Mission being purely spiritual and humanitarian, it shall have no connection with politics.

6. Anyone who believes in the Mission of Sri Ramakrishna, or who sympathizes or is willing to cooperate with

the above mentioned aims and objects of the Association, is eligible for the membership.⁵¹

The aims and objects having been thus specified, the Mission was handed over to a Board of Trustees. Swami Vivekananda himself became the General President and appointed Swami Yogananda and Swami Brahmananda as the Vice-President and the President respectively, of Calcutta Centre.

As soon as the Mission was established Swami Vivekananda started his tour of the historical places of Northern India. He visited Punjab, Kashmir and a few states of Rajputana, delivering his speeches with his characteristic enthusiasm and fervour. He placed before his countrymen the glorious achievements of their motherland in the past and the vital needs of the nation. He also "unfolded before the country a glowing picture of how the spiritual ideas of the race, which had their origin in the soil of India in the dim past, travelled from here to the far distant countries of the East and the West, the North and the South through the shining scores of centuries, considerably influencing the philosophical thoughts of Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato and the Egyptian Neo-Platonism and also the cultural life of Spain, Germany and other European countries at different periods of history from the most ancient times. He also traced the abiding influence of Indian thought in the writings of some of the eminent modern European thinkers like Schopenhauer, Kant, Max Muller, Paul Deussen and the like. He emphatically said that it was the perennial spring of spiritual wisdom which must invigorate all the departments of human activity. The eternal principles which were revealed by the saints and sages of India from age to age and which lay enshrined in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita and other sacred lores of the Hindus must come to the rescue of the secular life of the present age and also from the very basis of all the future developments in the socio-political life of the country. Above all he made it distinctly clear that

the national well-being depended not upon clinging to the mass of superstitions and local customs which were mere lifeless accretions of ages and needed a weeding out with a strong hand, but upon the acquisition of such noble virtues as purity of character, courage, strength, self-respect, love and service for others in the life of each individual. For on the strength of the individual lay the strength of the whole nation".⁵²

It was during this tour that Swami met with His Highness Maharaja of Kashmir and discussed with him the idea of establishing a monastery in Kashmir for carrying into practice his plans for the regeneration of India. On March 30, 1898 he left for Darjeeling with a view to recoup his failing health in the bracing climate of that lonely hilly retreat of the Himalayas. But the peace was not ordained for him. In April 1898 plague broke out in Calcutta and took a virulent form creating panic and confusion among the masses. The measures adopted by the government were far from being satisfactory. Swami hurriedly returned to Calcutta and made preparations to mitigate the afflictions and sufferings of the diseased with the help of his 'gurubhais' and disciples. The relief rendered to the afflicted and terror-stricken plague patients and the measures adopted by Swami Vivekananda and his followers were very much appreciated both by the people and the Government and made Ramakrishna Mission very popular.⁵³ It was a revolutionary departure from the

52. *Ibid.*, p. 133

53. The great historian Sir J. N. Sarkar, an eye-witness, has written: "That when the sweepers had fled away, he chanced upon a white woman one-day cleaning the streets with broom and basket in hand. This was none other than Nivedita, whose courage and sense of civic duty spurred the local youths to take up the cleansing the lanes and streets, following her example, and make their quarters free from the threat of pestilence."

—Gambhirananda: *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission*, Calcutta (1957), pp. 131-2

Swami Sadananda also set up an unparalleled example: "If the stench of garbage accumulated in a narrow lane repelled even the practised sweepers, he would nonchalantly snatch the basket and spade from

traditional monastic practice in India—the practical application of Vedanta by means of this selfless service to the suffering thousands in times of their direst needs.

Even after the establishment of the Belur Math and the practical demonstration of service on many occasions such as in Calcutta plague, Swami failed to convince some of his 'gurubhais' by his new conception of religion, viz., the worship of God through the service of man." They had heard Sri Ramakrishna speak time and again against preaching, excessive study of the scriptures, and charitable activities, and exhort aspirants to intensify their love of God through prayer and meditation in solitude. Therefore they regarded Vivekananda's activities in the West as out of harmony with the Master's teachings. One of them said bluntly to the Swami, 'You did not preach our Master in America ; you only preached yourself'. The Swami retorted with equal bluntness, "Let people understand me first ; then they will understand Sri Ramakrishna".⁵⁴

"But things came to a climax one day at Balaram's house in Calcutta, when Swami Jogananda, a brother disciple whom Sri Ramakrishna had pointed out as belonging to his 'inner circle' of devotees, said that the Master had emphasized 'Bhakti' alone for spiritual seekers and that philanthropic activities, organizations, homes of service for the public good, and patriotic work were the Swami's own peculiar ideas, the result of his Western education and travel in Europe and America".⁵⁵

Swami was flared up. He said : "You think you have understood Sri Ramakrishna better than myself, Your Bhakti

one of them and set about removing the decomposed heap till the sweepers too would step forward to help him. At the end, he would congratulate them and embrace them warmly, regardless of their social distance and dirty bodies. Or if their was an uncared-for patient, he would hug him and nurse him to recovery." *Ibid.*, p. 132

54. Nikhilananda., p. 127.

55. *Ibid.*

is sentimental nonsense which makes one impotent. Hands off.....Who cares for your Bhakti and Mukti ? Who cares what the Scriptures say ? I will go into a thousand hells cheerfully if I can rouse my countrymen, immersed in Tamas, to stand on their own feet and be men inspired with the spirit of 'Karma-Yoga ! I am.....a follower of him only.....who serves and helps others, without caring for his own Bhakti and Mukti".⁵⁶

"The Swami's voice was choked with emotion, his body shook, and his eyes flashed fire. Quickly he went to the next room. A few moments later some of his brother disciples entered the room and found him absorbed in meditation, tears flowing from his half-closed eyes. After nearly an hour the Swami got up, washed his face, and joined his spiritual brothers in the drawing-room. His features still showed traces of the violent storm through which he had just passed ; but he had recovered his calmness. He said to them softly : When a man attains Bhakti, his heart and nerves become so soft and delicate that he cannot bear even the touch of a flower :.....I cannot think or talk of Sri Ramakrishna long without being overwhelmed. So I am always trying to bind myself with the iron chains of 'Jnana', for still my work for my motherland is unfinished and my message to the world not fully delivered. So as soon as I find that those feelings of Bhakti are trying to come up and sweep me off my feet, I give a hard knock to them and make myself firm and adamant by bringing up austere 'Jnana'. Oh, I have work to do ! I am a slave to Ramakrishna, who left his work to be done by me and will not give me rest till I have finished it. And oh, how shall I speak of him ? Oh, his love for me".⁵⁷

56. Life (English), III. 158-9 ; (Bengali), III, 723-25, Quoted by Majumdar., pp. 76-7.

57. Nikhilananda., pp. 128-9,

HIMALAYAN MONASTERY

Swami Vivekananda now decided to establish a monastery in some secluded corner of Himalayas, "where the people from the East and the West could live together in spiritual comradeship and practise the Vedanta philosophy and get their outlook on life greatly widened by a mutual exchange of their highest cultural and spiritual ideas".⁵⁸ After a diligent search through the eternal snow ranges of Himalayas the estate of Mayavati, at an altitude of 6800ft., lying 50 miles from Almora, was found ideal for the establishment of Monastery. Consequently on March 19 (the auspicious birthday of Sri Ramakrishna), 1899 the monastery came into existence and was named as Advaita Ashram. In order that devotees coming from the different parts of the world and belonging to different religions and faiths might carry on their religious practices without any interference, it was decided by Swami that in Advaita Ashram there would be no worship of images, symbols or pictures of Gods and no religious ceremony except the 'Viraja Homa'.

Moreover Advaita Ashram, Almora, became the permanent seat for the 'Prabuddha Bharat', an English journal of the Ramakrishna Order which was started at Madras by some Madrasi disciples in July 1896. After the demise of its noted editor, B. R. Rajam Iyer, in May 1898 the publication of 'Prabuddha Bharat' remained suspended till its office was shifted to Ashram and a small hand-press was set up there to make the publication of the journal and other books possible. Swami Swarupananda and Mr. Sevier were appointed as the Editor and Manager respectively. With the help of his disciples Swami established many more such institutions of public utility in different parts of India before he left for his second journey to the West on June 20, 1899.

SECOND JOURNEY TO THE WEST

In his Second journey to England and America Swami Vivekananda was accompanied by Sister Nivedita and Swami Turiyananda. The object of this visit was to further the progress of the work he had begun during the first visit. During his second visit he opened many new centres in West, contacted new persons and delivered numerous lectures.⁵⁹ Two things are specially worthy of expression during his second visit to the West. In the first place he was found gradually detached more and more from the external world, and was completely indifferent to the surroundings. He was looking tired and world weary.

In the second place, a great change was noticed in his views of American Civilisation. "During his first visit he had been enthusiastic about almost everything he saw—the power, the organisation, the material prosperity, the democracy, and the spirit of freedom and justice. But now he was greatly disillusioned. In America's enormous combinations and ferocious struggle for supremacy he discovered the power of Mammon. He saw that the commercial spirit was composed, for the most part of greed, selfishness and a struggle for privilege and power. He was disgusted with the ruthlessness of wealthy business men, swallowing up the small trades people by means of large combinations. That was indeed tyranny. He could admire an organisation ; "But what beauty is there among a pack of wolves ? He said to a disciple. He also noticed in all their nakedness, the social vices and the arrogance of race, religion and colour. America, he confided to Miss Macleod, would not be the instrument to harmonise East and West".⁶⁰

Suddenly, in December 1900, he felt a strong desire to return to India. So without waiting for a single day he took the first steamer and came back to Belur on January 24, 1901.

59. Chief of them were centres at San Francisco, Oakland and Alameda.

60. Nikhilananda : *op. cit.*, p. 163.

THE DEPARTURE

But the rest was not in store for him. No sooner did he arrive at Belur he proceeded to Mayavati Ashram to see Mr. Sevier,⁶¹ thereafter, to East Bengal on a lecturing tour. He also went to the two places of pilgrimage in Assam, as his widowed mother had expressed an earnest desire to visit there. This was also an object of his tour, for on January 26, 1901 he had written to Mrs. Ole Bull: "I am going to take my mother on pilgrimage....This is the one great wish of a Hindu Widow. I have brought only misery to my people all my life. I am trying to fulfil this one wish of hers".⁶²

Swami Vivekananda was suffering from asthma as well as from diabetes in those days.⁶³ His health already poor, was going from bad to worse. At the request of his disciples he lived in complete retirement for about seven months in Belur and assigned all his responsibilities to his disciples.

At the request of Japanese artist, Okakura, who had visited him, he went in his company to Bodh Gaya. From there he went to Benaras (Now Varanasi) to lay the foundation of what later became a great organisation known as Sri Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service. This tour aggravated his illness.

It was Friday, the fourth of July, 1902 when Swami Vivekananda finally threw off the bondage of the body. He was thirty nine years and a few months when his athletic body was laid upon the pyre.⁶⁴

61. Mr. Sevier had died when Swami was in Europe.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 166

63. His health was marred very early by the attacks of diabetes, the poison from which he died. This Hercules had death always sitting by his side.

64. He often used to say "I shall never live to see forty."

"But the flame of that pyre is still alight today. From his ashes, like those of the Phoenix of old, has sprung anew the conscience of India—the magic bird faith in her unity and in the Great Message, brooded over from Vedic times by the dreaming spirit of his ancient race—the message for which it must render account to the rest of mankind".⁶⁵

"Blessed is the country in which he was born, blessed are they who lived on this earth at the same time, and blessed, thrice blessed are the few who sat at his feet".⁶⁶

65. Rolland, Romain ; op. cit., p. 7.

66. From Memoirs of Sister Christine ; quoted in selections from Swami Vivekananda, Advaita Ashram, Almora (III Ed. 1957) p. 10,

CHAPTER II

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

EARLY INFLUENCE

Swami Vivekananda was first moved by reading John Stuart Mill's 'Essays on Religion.' "Which caused his optimistic surface theism, gleaned in fashionable Brahmo Samajist circles, to crumble away. The face of evil in nature appeared to him and he revolted against it. But he was powerless to prevent the intrusion of bored disillusion and antique melancholy".¹ Afterwards he tried to adopt the theories of Spencer, with whom he had corresponded, in vain.² In college days he confided his scepticism to his friend Brajendra Nath Seal³ and begged him to guide in his search for truth. Seal asked him to read Shelley and for sometime the soul of Vivekananda bathed in the aerial waves of Shelley's Pantheism.

Seal was a rationalist of a particular kind. His rationalism was an amalgamation of the pure monism of Vedanta, the Hegelian dialectic of the Absolute Idea and the gospel of the French Revolution : "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity." He believed that the principle of individualism was 'the evil' and Universal Reason 'The Good'. It was then essential that pure reason should be manifested ; this was the great modern problem, and Brajendra thought to solve it by Revolution".⁴ His revolutionary and imperial nationalism appealed to one side of Vivekananda's domineering nature but his tumultuous personality was not to be confined within such limits. At

1. Rolland, Romain : Life of Ramakrishna ; Advaita Ashram, 4, Wellington Lane, Calcutta-13 ; (VI Ed. 1960) p. 225.

2. Sardananda has written that Herbert Spencer was astonished by his daring criticisms and admired the precocity of his philosophic intellect.

3. The great intellectual and Ex-Vice-chancellor of the University of Mysore who was one of the most solid and erudite philosophers in India. He had related his reminiscences of Vivekananda in an article written for 'Prabuddha Bharat' of 1907, and reproduced in The Life of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. I pp. 172-7.

that time he was too intoxicated with the beauty of the world and its passions. "It was mockery to offer him a diet of immanent Reason, a bloodless God. Being a real Hindu for whom life is the first attribute, if not the very essence of truth, he needed the living revelation, the realisation of the absolute, God made man—some holy Guru who could say to him. I have seen Him, I have touched Him, I have been He".⁴

Brahmo Samaj Movement was then at its height and like all other young Bengali intellectuals he was drawn towards it. He joined it. But soon he realised the cross-grained fanaticism of the organisation which was fatal to his free and living intelligence. He was not prepared to abdicate Indian wisdom before the badly assimilated knowledge of the West. He next imposed upon himself the life of an ascetic, reading Indian philosophy and Indian scriptures and meditating day and night. He was lured by Vedanta and at this juncture he went to meet his Master Ramakrishna—who was to govern his rest of life. Ultimately, the philosophy of Vedanta, teachings of Ramakrishna and his own experience of life, these three sources, combined to influence his philosophy and mission. We shall now discuss them one by one.

INFLUENCE OF VEDANTA :

'Vedanta' in Sanskrit signifies the 'end or final aim of Vedas'. In Vedanta the pantheistic⁵ doctrine of the Brahman, the All-One is systematically developed, and placed on a philosophical foundation. The founder of the Vedanta, or rather the first thinker who made a formal presentation of it (in the Vedantasutras or Brahmasutras) was Badarayana. But it is impossible to gain a satisfactory knowledge of the

4. Rolland, Romain : Life of Ramakrishna, op. cit., p. 226,

5. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

6. The doctrine that reality comprises a single being of which all things are modes, moments, members, appearances or projections. As a religious concept Pantheism is to be distinguished from immanent Theism and Deism of asserting the essential immanence of God in the creatures.

system from his work alone. This is first supplied by the expositions of the numerous native commentators, of whom the most important was Sankara, who later was acknowledged as Sankaracharya, the greatest metaphysician of the world.

Besides expounding the Brahmasutras, Sankaracharya composed a large number of commentaries on the Upanisads and wrote several independent treatises on the Vedanta philosophy. It is logical to suppose that the conceptions of Sankaracharya agree in all essentials with the views set forth by Badarayana. Almost all the educated Hindus in modern India, except in so far as they have embraced European ideas, are adherents of Vedanta ; and three-fourths of them accept Sankaracharya's interpretation of Brahmasutras, while the rest are divided among the varying explanations of the system offered by one or the other of the remaining commentators, namely, Ramanuja, Madhava, Vallabha and Nimbarka.

The fundamental proposition of the Vedanta philosophy is in agreement with the doctrine of the ancient 'Upanisads,' viz ; the atman i.e. our self or our soul, is identical with the Brahman the All Soul. Since the eternal and infinite Brahman, the power that works in everything, cannot consist of parts, or be subject to change (for everything that consists of parts, and is liable to change, is perishable) it follows that everyone is essentially not a part or emanation of the Brahman, but is Brahman entire and indivisible. Nothing real exists besides Brahman ; there is one only, without a second.⁷ Therefore, in India the Vedanta philosophy in the form in which Sankaracharya presented is called the philosophy of Advaita or the doctrine of non-duality.

The central concept of this doctrine is that the entire world of phenomena is merely an illusion which vanishes on closer examination ; or like a dream image, which seems real only to the sleeper, but disappears in waking hours.

7. Hastings, James : Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics. Vol. XII, T. & T., Clark, 38, George Street, Edinburgh, (III Ed. 1954). p. 597.

There is only one thing which is unaffected by this delusion in the universe—our-self, the soul. This self admits of no proof, but it also stands in no need of proof, for it is in itself the basis of all argument, and therefore is already established antecedent to any possibility of proof. Similarly, also, it cannot be denied, for every one in denying it assumes and testifies to its existence. The self, moreover, cannot be anything distinct from Brahman, since Brahman alone exists. Everything that is asserted to the Brahman—pure, spiritual nature, omnipresence, eternity, etc.,—holds good, therefore, of our soul. Here in our inner self we must look for knowledge. In himself alone in the depth of his own being, can man find the solution of the riddle of the universe, and know the only true real.

Whence 'ignorance' arises or by which the true condition of things is hidden from us, the Vedanta philosophy does not inquire. It tells us only that ignorance is removed by knowledge or universal perception. If this universal perception has been attained, and thereby the illusory nature of everything that is not soul, and the absolute identity of the soul with Brahman understood, the determining conditions for the earthly existence of the soul are removed. For this earthly existence is itself indeed only an illusory appearance. He who knows 'I am Brahman' has gained emancipation from the 'Samsara' (World).⁸ At death, according to this philosophy, the wise man is lost in Brahman.

Swami Vivekananda was influenced by this school of philosophy. He was an apostle of this Advaita Vedanta and belongs to the tradition of the great commentators on the Advaita System. He was an Advaitist and a mayavadi but his reconciling mind added peculiarities to his interpretations. His vedantic writings are never more western or modern edition of Sankara's system."⁹

8. *Ibid.*, p. 597

9. Varma, V. P. op. cit., p. 116-7.

TEACHINGS OF RAMAKRISHNA :

Ramakrishna Paramhansa (1836-86)—one of the greatest saints and mystics of modern India—was the acknowledged teacher (Guru) of Swami Vivekananda. Teachings of Ramakrishna exercised most profound influence on his mind.¹⁰ In fact, the mission of Vivekananda's life was to put the preachings of Ramakrishna into practice.¹⁰ The chief object of Ramakrishna's discourses was the realisation of God, attainable only by the development of high spiritual life. This was possible only when people discard the desire for material prosperity (Vishaya-Vasana) and lure for woman and gold (Kamini-Kanchana) and turn all actions and thoughts towards God. "But this did not require renunciation of wordly life which, he held, was fully compatible with spiritual development if the aim of realizing God were

* "It is impossible to write about Swami Vivekananda without going back to Sri Ramakrishna at whose feet Swami Vivekananda learned and whose message Swami Vivekananda spread. Some two thousand four hundred years ago Greece produced Socrates who did not write but whose life and message have been celebrated in the immortal 'Dialogues of Plato'. Who could think of Socrates without Plato and Plato without Socrates? The same analogy holds in the case of India in the nineteenth century. She saw the birth of a great mystic sannyasi in Sri Ramakrishna who lived as a brahmachari even in his married life, who had not read much but who had in himself a reservoir of great religious inspiration. He knew he had a new message for the world and he wanted a mouthpiece, and he found it in Swami Vivekananda. Hence it is not difficult to see that to appreciate Swami Vivekananda one has to go back to the personality and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. It was a unique combination that both were indispensable to each other. Sri Ramakrishna was thought; Swami Vivekananda was expression of that thought."

Dr. A. R. Wadia, M.A., Ph.D., Director, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Bombay, writes in his article ; SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION contributed to Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume, p. 252

10. Vivekananda often spoke of his master with pious gratitude. He dedicated to him in particular a celebrated lecture in New-York, published under the title : 'My Master' in Volume IV of the complete works.

steadily kept in view, and the Ultimate Reality—Soul or God as distinct from the evanescent world—were never lost sight of".¹¹ When asked, 'how can passion be eliminated?' his reply was, 'why should it be eliminated?' Give it a new turn and direct it towards God.¹²

Ramakrishna also believed that all religions of the world were true and if pursued properly would lead to salvation. He had himself tested the efficacy of the different modes of 'Sadhana', or spiritual discipline prescribed by different religions.¹³ His life was a laboratory for the synthesis of different systems of religion. This unique synthesis of different systems of religions of the world was expressed by him in four simple words—'Yata mat tata path'. To him every religion was a path to salvation. "He was asked, how God could be both 'Sakara' (immanent) and 'Nirakara'

11. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 12

12. This idea was illustrated by several parables, two of whom may be quoted :

"As an unchaste woman, busily engaged in household affairs, is all the while thinking of her secret lover, even so, O thou man of the world, do thy round of worldly duties : but fix thy heart always on the Lord."

"As a wet nurse in a rich family brings up the child of her master, loving the baby as if it were her own, but knows well that she has no claim upon it ; so think ye also that you are but trustees and guardians of your children whose real father is the Lord God in Heaven."

"Max Muller : Ramakrishna : His Life and Sayings. Longmans, Green and Co. (I Ed. 1898), p. 179

13. He was first initiated into the 'Tantrik' mode of 'Sadhana'. He practised it for two years and passed successfully through all the stages. He then followed the mode of 'Sadhana' laid down by the Vaishnava cult, and is said to have obtained a vision of Krishna. He was next formally initiated into ascetic life by Totapuri, a great saint who had realised in his life the highest truths of Vedanta and practised the Vedantic Sadhana. Ramakrishna was then initiated into the 'Sufi' doctrine of Islam and followed all the rites prescribed by the religion. He ate and dressed like a Muslim, offered regular prayers to Allah, ceased to visit Hindu temples and in three days, obtained the vision of God. Later, he practised similar 'Sadhana' according to Christian rite and on the third day obtained the vision of Jesus Christ.

—Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 13

(transcendent). He replied, 'exactly as water can exist in a liquid, solid (ice) and invisible (gaseous) form.' He further said, 'as water is called by different names in different languages, so different religions call God by different names like Hari, Siva, Allah, Christ, etc., but all denote the same God'.¹⁴

He was further asked that "if the God of every religion is the same, why is it then that the God is painted differently by different religionists ? He answered : God is one but his aspects are different : as one master of the house is father to one, brother to another, and husband to a third, and is called by these different names by those different persons, so one God is described and called in various ways according to the particular aspect in which He appears to his particular worshippers".¹⁵

This catholicity of views may be regarded as a distinctive contribution of Ramakrishna Paramhansa to the modern world which has been divided by religion into many water-tight compartments. Ramakrishna was a visible embodiment of the spiritual attainment of India. This spirit of tolerance and harmony of different religions, which Ramakrishna had established by personal test, was the main subject of Vivekananda's discourse in the Parliament of Religions.

While delivering an address at the Shakespeare club of Pasadena, California on January 27, 1900 he said : "Now all the ideas that I preach are only an attempt to echo his ideas. Nothing is mine originally except the wicked ones. But every word that I have ever uttered which is true and good, is simply an attempt to echo his voice".¹⁶ To conclude, it may be said that in his teacher, Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda found the key to life.

14. Majumdar : *op. cit.*, p. 14

15. *Ibid.*, p. 14

16. Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda : Vol. VII. p. 79

PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS :

The third source of Vivekananda's philosophy was his own experience of life. He had lived an eventful life. His was the many-sided role of a Sannyasin and a social reformer and, a nationalist and a revolutionary. He had travelled "throughout the length and breadth of India, from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, mixing with saints and scholars and simple souls alike, learning from all, teaching to all, and living with all, seeing India as she was and is so grasping in its comprehensiveness that vast whole, of which his master's life and personality had been a brief and intense epitome".¹⁷

His extensive journey gave him the singular advantage of understanding the life and culture of many important countries of the world and to strip off the illusion about them. He saw from his own eyes the wretched condition of Indian masses, compared it with the glorious past, and set before himself the task of resurrecting them." His philosophy has its roots in life. It is not merely essentialistic and conceptualistic but has an existential character. The great defect of modern European and American philosophy is that it has lost contact with life. It is getting lost in the thick jungles of linguistic analysis. Hazy logical symbolism losing touch with life is useless and barren. But the philosophy of Vivekananda is lifegiving and dynamic".¹⁸ In short, the truths that he preached were acquired by reflections on personal experiences.

UNIQUE PERSONALITY :

We have described so far, the main influences and incidents in the life of Vivekananda. Now, before we proceed with an exposition of his philosophy we deem it better to add a few words about his personality.

17. Introduction : Our Master and his Message : Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda : Vol. I., p. XVII.

18. Varma, V.P., *op. cit.*, p. 117

His was a mighty, majestic and comprehensive personality. He was endowed by nature with a muscular body, gigantic intellect and a mystic consciousness. The world knows him as a spiritual giant who employed his amazing will-power, energy and eloquence to bring about a regeneration of India. The monk, social reformer and humanist Vivekananda wanted, as he said, to fall on the society like an avalanche. "His intellectual vision was immensely clear and he could penetrate into the currents and cross-currents that were manifested in the history of India...It appeared as if the 'Virya' and 'Ojas' of the Mahabharatan heroes and the stalwart protagonists of Hindu imperialism in the days of the Mauryas and the Guptas was combined in his magnificent personality, with the spiritual 'Tejas' characteristic of the ancient seers of the Veda and Vedanta".¹⁹ In a short lifetime of only thirty-nine years he succeeded in infusing a dynamic and heroic spiritual fervour to the formation of the cultute-complex of India. For, as Romain Rolland wrote, "he suffered from that excess of power which insists on domination and within him there was a Napoleon".²⁰ "His pre-eminent characteristic was kingliness. He was a born king and nobody ever came near him either in India or America without paying homage to his majesty".²¹

SUPERNATURAL POWERS :

Swami Vivekananda was gifted with extraordinary supernatural powers. He was a saint of the highest type. Sri Ramakrishna is said to have transferred all his supernatural powers to him. This aspect has been discussed in detail in many biographies of Vivekananda written by his disciples and devotees. Although it is more or less a matter of faith yet even a sceptic has reasons to be convinced that Swami was bestowed with some supernatural powers without which

19. Varma, V.P., *op. cit.*, p. 610

20. Rolland, Romain, *Life and Gospel of Vivekananda* : p. 19

21. Rolland, Romain, *Life of Ramakrishna* : pp. 232-33

he could not have done miracles in his lifetime. He possessed that supreme knowledge (Jnana) of which the Gita speaks and which comes only after the realisation of oneness with the Supreme Being. He had wonderful memory. That is why he never prepared his talks and discourses.

ORATOR BY DIVINE RIGHT :

After his appearance in the Parliament of Religions, an American journal, 'New York Critique', referred to him as 'an orator by divine right.' The wellknown poetess, 'Harriet Monroe,' who was for many years editor of 'Poetry : A Magazine of Verse' in her autobiography, 'A Poet's Life', recorded her impressions of Swami Vivekananda in the Parliament of Religions in the following words : "The handsome monk in the orange robe gave us in perfect English a masterpiece. His personality, dominant, magnetic, his voice, rich as a bronze bell ; the controlled fervor of his feeling ; the beauty of his message to the Western world he was facing for the first time—these combined to give us a rare and perfect moment of supreme emotion. It was human eloquence at its highest pitch".²² Of the many learned men in the East who took part in the great World's Parliament of Religions, Vivekananda was the most popular favourite and when it was known that he was to speak, thousands were turned away for want of room. Nor was it curiosity alone that drew the masses : for those who heard him once were so impressed by the Magnetism of his fine presence, the charm and power of his eloquence, his perfect command of the English language and the deep interest in what he had to say, that they desired all the more to hear him again."²³ He was also fearless and daring in his comments. Once he was scheduled to speak on his favourite subject, Sri Ramakrishna, in a meeting at Boston.

22. Burke : Swami Vivekananda in America : New Discoveries (1950), Calcutta, pp. 59-60

23. *Ibid.*, p. 64

But the sight of the audience repelled him so much that he started speaking on the vices and follies of the American society instead of the subject previously announced. The result was the great noise and excitement. Hundreds of people left the meeting in protest but he did not deviate from attacking the hypocrisy of American civilization. He criticised their greed, ferocious struggle for supremacy and their spirit of lucre. Words came straight from his heart and went directly into the hearts of his listeners and in the end he was applauded.

OTHER ARTISTIC INSTINCTS :

Besides eloquence and spiritual powers Swami Vivekananda had many more literary, musical and artistic qualities. He possessed the literary talents of highest order. He had a command over English and most of his religious works are written in this language. He had an equal command over Bengali. But "his Bengali writings are practically confined to the articles in 'Udbodhana' later collected in four books, and his letters."²⁴ At a time when Sanskritised style was in vogue, he adopted a very simple colloquial Bengali language in his articles. In the beginning his new colloquial style suffered harsh criticism but afterwards it received great ovation. The great poet Rabindranath Tagore also appreciated the new style introduced in Bengali literature by Swami Vivekananda. "He cited Vivekananda's book (Prachya O Paschatya)" as a model for showing how colloquial Bengali can be made a living and forceful language. Such ideas, such language, similarly such penetrating liberal vision and the ideal of synthesis between the East and the West that this book contained is surprising to one.²⁵

He was also a good poet. His 'Kali the Mother', 'My play is done', 'Song of Sannyasin,' 'To the Awakened India'

24. Majumdar : *op. cit.*, p. 94

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 94-5

and 'Hold on Yet a While' are some of the good poems. "It may be believed that if Narendranath Datta had not been Swami Vivekananda, Bengal might have one more addition to the large number of her good poets of the nineteenth century."²⁶ He was also a good historian and gave a new interpretation of the evolution of Indian History. He proved that in ancient India the centres of national life were intellectual and spiritual and not political."²⁷

Swami was also trained in music and art. His younger brother Mahendra Nath Datta informs that "Dada (elder brother) used to draw pictures in boyhood. He used to draw coloured pictures with water-colours that used to be sold at four annas a box. He could paint well, besides, he had a good voice in singing."²⁸ Art was his hobby and he was exclusively adept in it.²⁹ In the conference of the History of Religions held at Paris in 1900 he protested against the then accepted theory of Greek influence on Indian Arts. He said : "Take painting and sculpture, what do you see in the Hindu Painting ? All sorts of grotesque and unnatural figures. What do you see in a Hindu temple ? A 'Chatur-bhang' (bent four times) or some such things. But take into consideration any Italian picture or Grecian statue.... What a study of nature you find in them... The secret of Greek art is its imitation of Nature even to the minutest details ; whereas the secret of Indian art is to represent the ideal, the

26. *Ibid.* p. 95

27. Cf. Historical Evolution of India : The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. VI., pp. 157-67

28. Datta : Swami Vivekananda : Patriot and Prophet, Navabharat Publishers, Calcutta, (1954), p. 299

29. Once Swami was staying at the house of a Barrister at Poona where "somebody had a conversation with him about the paintings of Ravi Varma, then famous as the innovator of a new technique in Indian Art of Painting. Swamiji pointed out the defects of the painter. The interlocutor was taken aback that how a begging friar could dare to criticise Ravi Varma, who then enjoyed India wide celebrity. The crushing reply came from the host himself who answered that Swamiji was an adept in art." *Ibid.*, p. 300

supersensual, has become degraded into painting grotesque images. Now, true art can be compared to a lily which springs from the ground, takes its nourishment from the ground, is in touch with the ground, and yet is quite high above it (when full blown). So Art must be in touch with Nature,—and wherever that touch is gone, Art degenerates—yet it must be above Nature.”³⁰

E. B. Havell and several Indian artists including Nandalal Bose were inspired by Swami Vivekananda. All these things point out that Narendranath Dutta might have been a fine art-critic or an artist of world repute if he had not been the saint, reformer and philosopher Swami Vivekananda.

RECEPTACLES OF HIS PHILOSOPHY :

There are a number of essays, poems and writings of Swami Vivekananda which reveal his philosophy. Several of them have been written against a social and political background. Numerous lectures, addresses, poems and sayings, ranging over a variety of subjects and covering the greater part of his life, supply the material for a detailed account of his philosophy. Abundant material is available, for an assessment of his social and political thought, in his letters, debates, conversations, and statements. Fortunately all his speeches and writings have been collected and published by Advaita Ashram in the form of the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda in Eight Volumes. The complete works of Swami Vivekananda cover little more than four thousand pages. The strictly philosophical portions of his writings are (a) the Jnana Yoga, (b) lectures on Vedanta philosophy delivered by him in India and in various other countries, (c) Commentary on the aphorisms of Patanjali. His social and political philosophy is contained in his “Lectures from Colombo to Almora,” “The Modern India,” and “The East and the West.”

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 304-5

CENTRAL CONCEPT OF HIS PHILOSOPHY :

Like Vedanta, the central concept of Swami Vivekananda's philosophy is 'Brahman' which alone is real. In his own words, "the whole universe is one in the self which is called 'Brahman.' That self when it appears behind the universe is called 'God.' The same self when it appears behind this little universe, the body, is the soul.....Universal self which is beyond the universal modifications of 'Prakrite' is what is called 'Isvara, the Supreme Ruler, God. 'Isvara' alone is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world and its destiny. But, the Vedantic Brahman accepted by Vivekananda is neither the concrete absolute of Hegel nor the 'Sunya' of the Madhyamikas nor the 'Alayavijnana' of the Yogacaras. It resembles to some extent the 'Tathata' of Asvaghosa but the difference is that the latter (Asvaghosa) is not very emphatic on the mystical perception of the 'Tathata'.³¹

The creative genius of Vivekananda lies in modifying the classical doctrine of Vedanta. He refused to believe that Vedanta is merely theoretical but held that, "the Vedanta as religion must be intensely practical".³² He did not agree with the view that Vedanta teaches quietism and renunciation. He did not also reconcile himself to the view of individual salvation when the rest of humanity groaned and sighed in misery and held that Vedanta could be practised in this very world".³³

Two points deserve mention here. One is that though spirituality is dominant in the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda yet it is mingled with humanitarianism. So much so that spirituality is believed to be incomplete and futile without humanitarian activity. The second point is that Vedanta is an instrument for regenerating and revitalising India by making the masses strong and self-reliant.

Thus, in the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda, contemplation and action, 'Nirvikalpa Samadhi' and humanitarian activity, God and the world are synthesised. Individual salvation and social service run parallel to each other.

31. Varma, V.P., *op. cit.*, pp. 117-8

32. Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda : Vol. II., p. 291

33. Varma, R. P., *op. cit.*, p. 4

CHAPTER III

CASTE AND UNTOUCHABILITY

The social, political and religious background which served to shape Swami Vivekananda's life and thought has already been discussed in the foregoing pages. The evolution of his philosophy starts from the time when he joined Brahmo-Samaj and noticed the evils of Hindu society, chief among them being the inhuman conditions of the Servile Class — the Sudras and Untouchables. To a great extent these conditions shaped his social, political and religious ideas and ideals. This chapter, therefore, is assigned to the consideration of his views on caste and untouchability.

VARNA VYAVASTHA :

The existence of classes based on some essential differences in disposition, ability and character is a common feature of human society all over the world. "But the evolution of a caste system postulating hereditary orders functioning within rigidly circumscribed spheres of social intercourse and yet sharing the large life of the community is a phenomenon peculiar to the organization of Hindu Society".¹ The social fabric of Hindus rests basically upon the caste system, commonly known as 'Varna Vyavastha' or Varna System. At the head of the hierarchy stands the Brahman (priest) and at the bottom the Sudra (servile class). Between the two stands, according to the original fourfold division, the Kshatriya (warrior) and the Vaisya (merchant or farmer).

The Hindu Caste System—Varna Vyavastha—is a complicated subject. It is a problem, capable of wide social tension; for "as long as caste in India does exist, the Hindus will hardly inter-marry or have any social intercourse with out-

¹. Masani: 'Caste and the Structure of Society' in 'The Legacy of India' Edited by G. T. Garrett; University Press, (Ed. I 1957) Oxford; p. 124.

warrior, but the scholar, the intellectually high and the spiritually sublime wise man—the Brahmana, literally meaning, one whose refuge is Brahman, the Absolute".⁷

The other fundamental distinction between the Indian caste-system and others, is that the later is individualistic whereas the former is socialistic. "The Western man is born individualistic ; the Hindu is socialistic, entirely socialistic".⁸

CASTE IN SOCIETY AND NOT IN RELIGION :

The Lord says in Gita : "The four castes have been created by me according to qualifications and activities".⁹ Originally, caste-system or Varna-vyavastha is the division of individuals into different sections or classes according to their inclinations and capacities. Ordinarily, the following four classes of individuals exist : First, those given to learning and devotion ; second, those given to rule the country ; third, those given to trade and commerce ; fourth, those given to serving and depending on others. A society, to be prosperous, needs all these four classes.¹⁰

Vivekananda did not accept that the institution of caste was linked with Hindu Religion. In his opinion, this institution had been of fundamental significance in protecting Hindus as a nation, and when such a basis for self-preservation will not exist, it will die a natural death. He said : "In religion there is no caste. A man from the highest caste and a man from the lowest may become a monk in India and the two castes become equal. The caste system is opposed to the religion of Vedanta".¹¹

He criticised social reformers and thinkers for pulling caste and religion together. He wrote, "caste is a social

7. Centenary Memorial Volume, p. 365

8. Women of India, p 20

9. Chaturvarnyam maya sristam guna-karma-vibhagasah.

10. Centenary Memorial Volume, p. 362

11. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda : Vol. III., p. 1

custom and all our great preachers have tried to break it down. From Buddhism downwards, every sect has preached against caste, and every time it has only riveted the chains. Beginning from Buddha down to Rammohan Roy, everyone made the mistake of holding caste to be a religious institution and tried to pull down religion and caste all together, and failed".¹²

He held that "in spite of all the ravings of the priests, caste is simply a crystallised social institution which after doing its service is now filling the atmosphere of India with its stench, and it can only be removed by giving back to the people their lost social individuality".¹³ Caste is simply the outgrowth of the political institutions of India, it is a hereditary trade guild. Trade competition with Europe has broken caste more than any teaching.

THE UNDERLYING IDEA OF CASTE SYSTEM :

Vivekananda was of the view that a lot of misunderstanding prevailed about caste in the world. He opined : "What caste really is not one in a million understands. There is no country in the world without caste. In India from caste we reach to the point where there is no caste. Caste is based throughout on that principle. The plan in India is to make everybody Brahmin, the Brahmin being the ideal of humanity. If you read the history of India you will find that the attempts have always been made to raise the lower classes. Many are the classes that have been raised. Many more will follow till the whole will become Brahmin. That is the plan. We have only to raise them without bringing down anybody. And this has mostly to be done by Brahmins themselves, because it is the duty of every aristocracy to dig its own grave ; and the sooner it does so, the better for all. No time should be lost. Indian caste is better than the caste which prevails in Europe or America".¹⁴

12. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. V., pp. 22-3

13. *Ibid.* ; p. 23

14. *Ibid.*, p. 214

The ideal of Hindu society is the Brahmin adorned with spiritual culture and renunciation. The Brahmin ideal means the ideal Brahminness in which worldliness is absolutely absent and true wisdom abundantly present. Vivekananda asked, "Have you not heard how it is declared that he, the Brahmin, is not governed by kings, and that his body cannot be hurt? That is perfectly true. Do not understand it in the light thrown upon it by interested and ignorant fools, but understand it in the light of the true and original Vedantic conception. If the Brahmin is he who has killed all selfishness and who lives and works to acquire and propagate wisdom and the power of love,—if a country is altogether inhabited by such Brahmans, by men and women who are spiritual and moral and good, is it strange to think of that country as being above and beyond all law? What police, what military are necessary to govern them? Why should anyone govern them at all? Why should they live under a government? They are good and noble and they are the men of God; these are our ideal Brahmans, and we read that in the 'Satya-Yuga' there was only one caste, and that was the Brahmin. We read in the 'Mahabharata' that the whole world was in the beginning peopled with Brahmans and that as they began to degenerate they became divided into different castes, and that when the cycle turns round they will go back to that Brahmanical origin".¹⁵

This implies that to be a Brahmin is to be spiritually enlightened and that the son of a Brahmin is not necessarily always a Brahmin. Although there is every possibility of his being a Brahmin yet he may not become so. Because there is a difference between Brahmin quality and Brahmin caste.

To prove this thesis Vivekananda argued, "as there are 'Sattva,' 'Rajas' and 'Tamas'—one or other of these gunas more or less—in every man, so the qualities which make a

Brahmin Kshatriya, Vaishya or a Shudra are inherent in every-man, more or less. But at time one or other of these qualities predominates in him in varying degrees and is manifested accordingly. Take a man in his different pursuits, for example, when he is engaged in serving another for pay, he is in Shudra-hood ; when he is busy in transacting some piece of business for profit, on his account he is a Vaishya ; when he fights to right wrongs then the qualities of a Kshatriya come out in him ; and when he meditates on God, or passes his time in conversation about Him, then he is a Brahmin. Naturally it is quite possible for one to be changed from one caste into another. Otherwise, how did Vishvamitra become a Brahmin and Parashurama Kshatriya ?¹⁶

Such was the ideal of caste, basically meant for raising individuals gently and slowly towards the realization of the noble ideal of spiritually enlightened man.

Vivekananda believed that caste was one of the greatest social institution that God had given to man. He also believed that though the unavoidable defects, foreign persecutions and above all the monumental ignorance and pride of many Brahmins who did not deserve the name had thwarted, in many ways, the legitimate fructification of the glorious Indian institution, yet it had already worked wonders for the land of Bharata and was destined to lead Indian community to its goal.

He was against the abolition of caste system. He suggested its readjustment according to the present conditions. He said : "From the time of Upanishads down to the present day, nearly all our great teachers have wanted to break through the barriers of caste, i.e., caste in its degenerated state, not the original system, what little good you see in the present caste clings to it from the original caste, which was the most glorious social institution."¹⁷

16. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol V., p. 377.

17. C. W. Vol. V. p. 198.

"Castes should not go; but, should only be readjusted accordingly. Within the old structure is to be found life enough for the re-building of two hundred thousand new ones. It is sheer nonsense to desire the abolition of caste. The new method is—evolution of the old".¹⁸

PRIVILEGE VITIATES THE NATURAL ORDER :

Caste system is not bad. It is a plan that Hindu society wants to follow. But the basic point is not to impose system of dull uniformity on society but to help everybody in attaining the status of a true Brahmin. Inequality of privilege has vitiated the caste system. It has degenerated Hindu Social Order into an instrument of exploitation, tyranny and oppression. It has perpetuated the spirit of separatism, hatred and enmity in society. Kantian principle : "Treat every human being as an end and never as a means" has been violated and the result is the tragic social behaviour patterns and iniquitous human relationship based on caste and untouchability.

Vivekananda was of the opinion that this orthodox uniformity must go from Hindu caste system. He said, "It is in the nature of society to form itself into groups ; and what will go will be these privileges. Caste is a natural order. I can perform one duty in social life, and you another ; you can govern a country, and I can mend a pair of old shoes, but that is no reason why you are greater than I, for can you mend my shoes ? Can I govern the country ? I am clever in mending shoes, you are clever in reading Vedas, that is no reason why you should trample on my head ; why if one commits murder should he be praised and if another steals an apple why should he be hanged ? This will have to go".¹⁹

He further said, "Caste is good : That is the only natural way of solving life. Men must form themselves into groups,

18. *Ibid.*, p. 215

19. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. III. p. 245

and you cannot get rid of that. Wherever you go there will be caste. But that does not mean that there should be these privileges. They should be knocked on the head. If you teach Vedanta to the fisherman he will say, 'I am as good a man as you, 'I am a fisherman, you are a philosopher, but I have the same God in me, as you have in you.' And that is what we want, no privilege for anyone, equal chances for all; let everyone be taught that the divine is within, and everyone will work his own salvation".²⁰

He asked the people to remember the old English proverb, "Give every man his due".²¹ Therefore, it is no use fighting among the castes. What good will it do? It will divide us all the more, weaken us all the more, degrade us all the more. The days of exclusive privileges and exclusive claims are gone, gone for ever from the soil of India, and it is one of the great blessings of the British rule in India. Even to the Mohammedan rule we owe that great blessing, the destruction of exclusive privilege. That rule was, after all, not all bad; nothing is all bad, and nothing is all good. The Mohammedan conquest of India came as salvation to the down-trodden, to the poor. That is why one-fifth of our people have become Mohammedans. It was not the sword that did it all. It would be height of madness to think it was all the work of sword and fire. And one-fifth—one-half—of your Madras people will become christians if you do not take care".²²

DON'T-TOUCHISM :

Swami Vivekananda was deadly opposed to Untouchability.²³ He said that India's doom was sealed the very day

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 245-6

21. *Ibid.*, p. 294

22. *Ibid.*, p. 294

23. An incident may be mentioned to illustrate this: "One day I was travelling on foot from Agra to Vrindaban. There was not a farthing with me. I was about a couple of miles from Vrindaban when I found a man smoking on the roadside, and I was seized with a desire to smoke. I said to the man 'Hallo, will you let me have a puff at your

they invented the word Mleccha and stopped from communion with others.²⁴ He rebuked Hindus as caste-ridden, superstitious, merciless, hypocritical, and atheistic cowards. He was distressed to find that in India, "The Paths of Knowledge, devotion and Yoga—all have gone, and now there remains only that of Don't-touchism—Don't touch me : Don't touch me : The whole world is impure and I alone am pure. Lucid Brahmajnana : Bravo ! Great God ! Now-a-days Brahmin is neither in the recesses of the heart, nor in the highest heaven, nor in all beings—now he is in the cooking pot. Formerly the characteristic of a nobel minded was त्रिभुवनमुपकार श्रेणिभिप्रीयमान to please the whole universe by one's numerous acts of service, "But now it is—I am pure and the whole world is impure...".²⁵

In the days of Swami Vivekananda untouchability was a common feature of Indian Society. It was prevalent all over the country especially in the south. Referring to it Vivekananda remarked : "Was there even a sillier thing before in the world than what I saw in The Malabar country ? The poor pariah is not allowed to pass through the same street as the high-caste man, but if he changes his name to a hodge-podge English name, it is all right ; or to a Mohammedan name, it is

chillum ?" He seemed to be hesitating greatly and said, 'Sir, I am a sweeper ; well there was the influence of old samskaras, and I immediately stepped back and resumed my journey without smoking. I had gone a short distance when the thought occurred to me that I was a sannyasin, who had renounced caste, family, prestige and everything—and still I drew back as soon as the man gave himself out as a sweeper, and could not smoke at the 'Chillum' touched by him. The thought made me restless at heart, then I walked on half a mile. Again I retraced my steps and came to the sweeper, whom I found still sitting there. I hastened to tell him, 'Do prepare a 'Chillum' of tobacco for me my dear friend.' I paid no heed to his objections and insisted on having it. So the man was compelled to prepare a chillum for me. Then I gladly had a puff at it and proceeded to Vrindaban"—
The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. V., p. 52

24. Complete Works, Vol. V., p. 52

25. Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda : Vol. VII. p. 476

all right. What inference would you draw except that these Malabarlis are all lunatics, their homes so many lunatic asylums, and that they are to be treated with derision by every race in India until they mend their manners and know better. Shame upon them that such wicked and diabolical customs are allowed".²⁶

It was really surprising to find Swami Vivekananda, the defender of Hindu faith, speaking in such strong terms. But Vivekananda was a practical Vedantin. He taught only that which he had himself practised and which was in strict conformity to the philosophy of Vedanta. He even went further when he said: We are orthodox Hindus, but we refuse entirely to identify ourselves with 'Don't-touchism'. That is not Hinduism, it is in none of our books; it is an orthodox superstition, which has interfered with national efficiency all along the line. Religion has entered in the cooking pot. The present religion of Hindus is neither the path of knowledge nor that of Reason,—it is 'Don't-touchism'—Don't touch me, 'Don't touch me'—that exhausts its description".²⁷

He appealed to Hindus to see that they did not lose their lives in the dire irreligion of 'Don't-touchism'. He further asked, "Must the teaching आत्मवत् सर्वमूर्तेषु—'Looking upon all beings as your own-self'—be confined to books alone? How will they grant salvation who cannot feed a hungry mouth with a crumb of bread? How will those who become impure at the mere breath of others purify others"?²⁸ Don't-touchism, he said, "is a form of mental disease. Beware. All expansion is life, all contraction is death. All love is expansion, all selfishness is contraction. Love is therefore the only law of life. He who loves lives, he who is selfish is dying. Therefore, love for love's sake".²⁹ In his letter dated Sept. 20, 1892 addressed to Pandit Shankerlal of

26. *Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 294-5

27. *Ibid.*, vol. VI., p. 321

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 321-22.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 322

Khetri, Vivekananda wrote, "We must see how the engine of society works in other countries, and keep free and open communication with what is going on in the minds of other nations, if we really want to be a nation again. And over and above all we must cease to tyrannise. To what a ludicrous state are we brought. If a 'Bhangi' comes to anybody as a 'Bhangi', he would be shunned as the plague ; but no sooner does he get a cupful of water poured upon his head with some mutterings of prayers by a Padri and get a coat on his back, no matter how threadbare, and come into the room of the most orthodox Hindu—I don't see the man who then dare refuse him a chair and a hearty shake of the hands ! Irony can go no further. And come and see what they, the Padris, are doing here in the Dakshin (South). They are converting the lower classes by lakhs, and in Travancore, the most priest-ridden country in India—where every bit of land is owned by the Brahmins, and the females, even of the royal family, hold it as high honour to live in concubinage with the Brahmins—nearly one fourth has become christian".³⁰

It was not because of the pinch of hunger that thousands of Hindu pariahs had turned christians but it was solely because of their failure, in past, to get any sympathy from Hindus. We had been day and night calling out to them 'Don't touch us', 'Don't touch us.' Vivekananda said that "Is there any compassion or kindliness of heart in the country ? Only a class of 'Don't-touchists ; kick such customs out. I sometimes feel the urge to break the barriers of 'Don't-touchism', go at once and call out, 'come, all who are poor, miserable, wretched and downtrodden', and to bring them all together.....unless they rise, the Mother won't awaken".³¹

30. C. W. Vol. V. p. 5

31. *Ibid*, Vol. VII., p. 246

CASTEISM—A BARRIER TO INDIA'S PROGRESS:

To Swami Vivekananda caste consciousness was a barrier to India's progress. Because at times casteism kills national consciousness. Although Caste loyalty is valuable as the first step to nationalism, yet when it degenerates into sectarianism and checks the growth of nationality, it becomes an unmitigated evil. Caste loyalty is a virtue but, when it degenerates into passive disloyalty to the state, it becomes a positive crime. Caste restrictions on actions likely to undermine the foundations of the social structure are wholesome ; but when such restrictions lead to disabling inequalities and denial of social justice, as in the case of the untouchables now mercifully called 'Harijana', they become a curse.

At one place Vivekananda said, "Good Heavens ! A country the big leaders of which have for the last two thousand years been only discussing whether to take food with the right hand or the left, whether to take water from the right side or the left if such a country does not go to ruins, what other will ? . A country, where millions of people live on the flower of the Mohua plant, and a million or two of Sadhus, and a hundred million or so of Brahmins such the blood of these poor people, without even the least effort for their amelioration—is that a country or a hell" ?³²

Vivekananda also realised that casteism "narrows, restricts and separates the noble bond of humanity." Even then he hoped that "it will crumble before the advance of ideas".³³ Signs are bright that Vivekananda's prophecy is on the way to fulfilment at no distant date. Fortunately some of the undesirable features have disappeared during last few years, though some of them still persist. Casteism is still not unimportant problem that baffles politicians, statesmen and social reformers alike.

32. Quoted by Majumdar : op. cit., 9. 138

33. Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Vol. I. p. 37*

SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM:

It is not easy to find a solution of the problem. Because the solution demands the death of the spirit of caste consciousness. It requires a change in the fundamental notions of Hindu life, a change in the values of life and a change in outlook and attitude towards men and things. Social reformers have expounded different theories to solve this problem. Some say that intercaste-marriages and dinners may solve the problem. Because such things will provide opportunities to the people of different castes and communities to evolve a common outlook on life and as such a feeling of oneness will necessarily follow. Others are of opinion that sub-castes must be abolished because there is greater dissimilarity in manners and status among the sub-castes than among the castes themselves. But such remedies are neither practicable nor effective and may prove to be wrong, if tried. Swami Vivekananda's solution of the caste question is not degrading those who are already high up in the social scale. It is not running amuck through food and drink, is not jumping out of our own limits in order to have more enjoyment but it comes by every one of us fulfilling the dictates of our Vedantic religion, by our attaining spirituality and by our becoming the ideal Brahmins. He said, "There is a law laid on each one of you in this land by your ancestors, whether you are Aryans, or non-Aryans, Rishis, or Brahmins, or the very lowest outcastes. The command is the same to you all, that you must make progress without stopping, and that from the highest man to lowest pariah, everyone in this country has to try and become the ideal Brahmin".³⁴ Thus, "The ideal at one end is the Brahmin and the ideal at the other end is the 'Chandala', and the whole work is to raise the chandala upto the Brahmin".³⁵ It, therefore, becomes necessary for us to examine Swami

34. C. W. III., p. 198

35. *Ibid.*, p. 295

Vivekananda's suggestions to raise the lower (untouchable) until it reaches on a level with the higher (Brahmin).

1. "My idea is first of all to bring out the gems of spirituality that are stored up in our books and in the possession of a few only, hidden as it were, in monasteries and in forests...In one word I want to make it popular. I want to bring out these ideas and let them be the common property of all, of every man in India".³⁶ In this way people will get the information, they will get below the surface of the problem and many misgivings about caste system will be removed.

2. Secondly, Sanskrit must be taught to them. Because all our scriptures are in this language³⁷ and "this difficulty cannot be removed until, if it is possible, the whole of our nation are good Sanskrit scholars"³⁸ Sanskrit alone can be helpful in making the plan a success. To substantiate his argument he stated, "The attempts of the great Ramanuja and Chaitanya and of Kabir to raise the lower classes of India show that marvellous results were attained during the lifetime of those great prophets ; yet the later failures have to be explained, and cause shown why the effect of their teachings stopped almost within a century of the passing away of these Masters. The secret is here. They raised the lower classes ; they had all the wishes that these should come up, but they did not apply their energies to the spreading of the Sanskrit language among the masses. Even the great Buddha made one false step when he stopped the Sanskrit language from being studied by the masses".³⁹

36. *Ibid.*, p. 290

37. The scriptures have been translated into many languages, of late, yet the importance of Sanskrit cannot be ignored because the purest water can be had from the source of the river.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 290

39. *Ibid.*, p. 290-1

3. Besides knowledge, culture is also essential.⁴⁰ Until the masses are cultured there can be no permanence in their raised condition. There will be another caste created, having knowledge and the advantage of Sanskrit, which will quickly get above the rest and rule them all the same. To this end Vivekananda appealed to Brahmins that "they must work hard to raise the Indian people by teaching them what they know, by giving out the culture that they have accumulated for centuries. It is clearly the duty of the Brahmins of India to remember what real Brahminhood is. As Manu says, all these privileges and honours are given to Brahmin because 'with him is the treasury of virtue'. He must open that treasury and distribute its valuables to the world".⁴¹ He further said that "it was because he did not give it to the people that the Mohammedan invasion was possible. It was because he did not open this treasury to the people from the beginning, that for a thousand years we have been trodden under the heels of everyone who chose to come to India. It was through that we have become degraded, and the first task must be to break open the cells that hide the wonderful treasures which our common ancestors accumulated ; bring them out, and give them to everybody, and the Brahmin must be the first to do it".⁴²

The only rational explanation of Vivekananda's thesis on caste is found in 'Mahabharata', which says—that in the beginning of 'Satya Yuga' there was one caste, the Brahmins, and then by difference of occupations people went on dividing themselves into different castes. And, it is also there, that in the coming 'Satya Yuga' all the other castes will have to go back to the same condition.

40. "The only way to bring about the levelling of the caste is to appropriate the culture, the education which is the strength of the higher castes."—Vivekananda : *Ibid.*, p. 291

41. C. W. III. p. 297

42. *Ibid.*, p. 298

To conclude, it may be said that Swamiji upheld the noble tradition of Hindu Unity and harmony by giving a synthetic interpretation of social relationship based on Varna-vyavastha, though he condemned conservatism and orthodoxy developed into the behaviour patterns of Hindu society. He favoured Varna-system essentially and originally based on natural dispositions and merits of the individual, and not on birth. Thus, to him the true measure of man was worth, not birth.

on the other hand, the social life of man is a function of a given social structure. It is not to maintain order in society that man is born, but to maintain order in society that man is born.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIETY AND RELIGION

In India, Swami Vivekananda, declared social structure and religion are organically interwoven. Caste hierarchy, sex inequality, untouchability, and social taboos flourished because of the misinterpretation of religion. Nowhere in the world we find religion dominating and determining the life of individual as in India. His economic activity, his social life, his marriage, birth and death, his physical movements, all are strictly controlled by religion. He challenged the Marxian dictum that man is moved only by economic forces. In India, he said, it is "always the.....religion..... Man cannot always think of matter, however pleasurable it may be".¹ Now before we proceed to discuss this subject in detail let us first study his concept of society.

THE CONCEPT OF SOCIETY :

Swami Vivekananda believed that an individual is born in a particular society, according to his past 'karmas' to work out its own destiny. In this respect, society is not a human creation, but an institution created by God Himself, according to the past 'Sakama-Karmas' of the 'Jivas' themselves. "Love, Renunciation, Unselfishness—three great manifestations of spirituality—from these alone can rise any Society, and stand. Neither physical prowess, nor economic superiority, nor practical dexterity can form such a basis."² Look at Nature outside. Do you not see a wonderful order everywhere, a magnificent, loving connection all around ? The sun rises, the moon sets, the stars smile, the wind blows, the river flows, the blossom blooms in what a loving unison, in what a perfect

1. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda : Vol. II. p. 64

2. Centenary Volume, p. 359

order ! The same, according to Swami, is the state of affairs in society inside, no less. It, too, is a perfect system, a full organic whole, a loving and a living union, a unity-in-difference, yet, ultimately, a union, a whole, a system. Its basis is Religion: its purpose, Spiritualism, its instruments, Scriptural Injunctions. It is not a political organisation, not an economic Unit, not a prudential concern at all.³

Swami also used the organic analogy in his analysis of society. He wrote : "The aggregate of many individuals is called Samashti (the whole), and each individual is called Vyashti (a part). You and I—each is Vyashti, society is Samashti. You, I, an animal, a bird, a worm, an insect, a tree, a creeper, the earth, a planet, a star,—each is Vyashti, while this Universe is Samashti."⁴

The Samashti like the Vyashti has a body, an organic life, a developing mind and soul. If any Vyashti wants social progress then he is to sacrifice some of his own interests for the sake of Samashti. The sacrifice of individual interest is essential for the happiness of all members of society. In his society the good point is that man can do one or two things well, with very little efforts, and not all things well. Therefore, individual cooperation plays an important role in man's social life.

In Vivekananda's view, all men have to transcend their petty interests for the wellbeing of the society. There is no short cut to such a life. It can be done only through gradual transition. Only in this lies the individual and social happiness. Gradual transition from ego-centrism to sociability will bring a man near to human goals. Therefore, every individual must be one with Samashti. In this Samashti religion has its own place as we will see in the following pages.

His view of society is quite in consonance with the spirit of Vedanta. Its main features may be summarised as follows :—

3. *Ibid.*, p. 253

4. *Ibid.*, p. 488

- (i) Society is a Divine creation ;
- (ii) It is the aggregate of different individuals ;
- (iii) Self-sacrifice is essential for the well-being of Samashti ;
- (iv) Gradual transition is needed for being one with Samashti ;
- (v) Cooperatively shared happiness will be the final result of human relations ; and
- (vi) Religion is the backbone of Samashti.

RELIGION AS THE CENTRAL THEME :

"Two attempts have been made in the world to found social life ; the one was upon Religion, and the other was upon Social Necessity ; the one was founded upon Spirituality the other upon Materialism ; the one upon Transcendentalism, the other upon Realism. The one looks beyond the horizon of the little material world and is bold enough to begin life there, even apart from the other. The other the second, is content to stand on things of the world and expects to find a firm footing there."⁵ He further said : "The sole, the whole force, the whole sanction, the whole cementing power behind society is one and only one...viz. Religion, Spiritualism, Other-worldliness. Society must, of course, provide for economic well-being and physical comforts. But the final aim, as everywhere else, is the development and perfection of the soul—whatever it may mean."⁶

Swami Vivekananda accepted religion not only as the backbone of society but also as the central theme of national life. In India, he observed, political power, economic superiority or prudential cunning had never been the basis of society. He believed that though different countries have their different aims in national life, India's national life is half-hearted without adopting religion as the pivotal thread in nation's life. This he expressed most beautifully in the

5. Complete Works, Vol. III. p. 156

6. Centenary Memorial Volume, p. 354

following words : "In India religious life forms the centre, the keynote of the whole music of national life ; and if any nation attempts to throw off its national vitality, the direction which has become its own through the transmission of centuries,—that nation dies, if it succeeds in the attempt. And, therefore, if you succeed in the attempt to throw off your religion and take up either politics or society, or any other thing as your centre, as the vitality of your national life, the result will be that you will become extinct. To prevent this you must make all and everything work through that vitality of your religion".⁷

Obviously Swami Vivekananda did not rule out the possibility of religious aspirations of the people in India's national life. He did not talk of imposition, but of supposition that people will fail to go ahead without adopting the best religious values. It, therefore, becomes necessary to analyse his concept of religion.

CONCEPT OF RELIGION :

By the term religion Swami Vivekananda did not mean the creeds or rituals but the fundamentals of Hindu religion. To him religion was neither word nor doctrine ; it was realisation. He gave very popular exposition of this in his talk on Hinduism in the Parliament of Religions. A few quotations from the same will facilitate us to understand his Concept of religion.

"The Hindus have received their religion through revelation, the Vedas. They hold that the Vedas are without beginning and without end. It may sound ludicrous to this audience, how a book can be without beginning or the end. But by the Vedas no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times. Just as the law of gravitation existed before its discovery and would exist if all humanity forgot it, so is it with the laws that govern the

spiritual world. The moral, ethical and spiritual relations between soul and soul and between individual spirits and the Father of all spirits were there before their discovery, and would remain if we forgot them.'

He further explained the meaning of soul in words : "Here I stand and if I shut my eyes and try to conceive my existence, 'I', 'I', 'i', what is the idea before me ? The idea of a body. Am I then nothing but a combination of material substances ? The Vedas declare, 'No'. I am a spirit living in a body. I am not the body ; the body will die but I shall not die. Here am I in this body, it will fall, but I shall go on living. I had also a past.....The Hindu believes that he is a spirit... that every soul is a circle whose circumference is nowhere, but whose centre is located in the body, and that death means the change of this centre from body to body.

"A soul with a certain tendency would by the laws of affinity take birth in a body which is the fittest instrument for the display of that tendency." Thus our birth is "determined by our past actions, and the future by the present. The soul will go on evolving up or reverting back from birth to birth and death to death. But here is another question : Is man a tiny boat in a tempest, raised one moment on the foamy crest of a billow and dashed down into a yawning chasm the next, rolling to and fro at the mercy of good and bad actions ? The heart sinks at the Idea, yet this is the law of Nature. Is there no hope ? Is there no escape ?

Quoting from Upanishads he says : "Hear ye children of immortal bliss, hear, ye who live in the highest places, I have found the way. By knowing Him who is beyond darkness we can go beyond death.

This leads on to the discussion of the nature of God. "He is everywhere, the pure and formless One, the Almighty and the All-merciful." And how to worship Him ? Through love. "He is to be worshipped as the one beloved, dearer than everything in this and the next life. A man ought to live in this world like a lotus leaf which grows in water but is never moistened by water, so a man ought to live in the world—his heart to God and his hands to work.

The Vedas teach that the soul is divine, only held in the bondage of matter ; perfection will be reached when this bond will burst, and the word they use for it is, therefore, 'Mukti'— freedom, freedom from the bonds of imperfection, freedom from death and misery.

"And this bondage can only fall off through the mercy of God, and this mercy comes on the pure. The pure and stainless see God,..... This the very centre, the very vital conception of Hinduism.

And what becomes when a man sees God ? "He lives a life of bliss infinite. He enjoys infinite and perfect bliss, having obtained the only thing in which man ought to have pleasure, namely God, and enjoys the bliss with God".⁸ In other words he becomes one with Brahman.

This Vedantic Concept of religion of Vivekananda is thus in full accordance with science which is nothing but the finding of Unity in Variety.

NEO-VEDANTISM :

But the Vedanta preached by Vivekananda has some features which distinguishes it from the traditional Vedanta of Sankaracharya. Sankara's Vedanta is known as 'Advaita' or non-dualism, pure and simple. It is also called 'Kevala-Advaita' or unqualified monism. It may also be called abstract monism in so far as Brahman, the ultimate reality, is according to it, devoid of all qualities and distinctions. The Vedanta of Vivekananda is also 'Advaita' in as much as it holds that Brahman, the ultimate reality, is one without a second. But as distinguished from the traditional Advaita of Sankara, it is a synthetic Vedanta which reconciles 'Advaita' or dualism and 'Advaita' or non-dualism and also other theories of reality. So also it may be called concrete monism in so far as it holds that Brahman is both qualified and qualityless ('saguna' and 'nirguna'), it has forms and is also formless ('Sakara' and 'Nirakara'). Hence Vivekananda's Vedanta system is regarded as Neo-Vedantism.

8. Complete Works : Vol. I, pp. 6-20

"The germs of Neo-Vedantism as also the rationale and beginning of its practical application are to be found in the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. It was left to Swami Vivekananda to develop them into the philosophy of Neo-Vedantism and lay the foundation of practical Vedanta."⁹

"The main outline of this new Vedanta was drawn by Sri Ramakrishna and it was Swami Vivekananda who filled it in with elaborate reasoning so as to work up a philosophy proper. It has been very aptly said that Swami Vivekananda is a commentary on Sri Ramakrishna. But the commentator with his giant intellect and profound understanding made such distinctive contributions that his commentary becomes itself a philosophy, just as Sankara's Commentary on the 'Vedanta-Sutra' is by itself a philosophy."¹⁰

In order to understand this, reference may be made to some teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. "First, Ramakrishna teaches that 'Brahman' and 'Sakti' or 'Kali' are not two different realities unrelated to each other, nor are they different realities of existences inseparably related to each other as substance and quality. They are only two aspects of the same reality or two states of the same thing and, therefore, non-different (abheda). Just as the same water of the sea is sometimes moving and sometimes motionless, or the same serpent sometimes crawls and sometimes remains coiled up and motionless, so the same reality is called 'Kali' or Brahman according as it does or does not create, maintain and destroy the world.....

"Secondly, Sri Ramakrishna teaches that it is the same reality that is the nameless and formless Brahman for the 'Jnani' or the man of philosophic insight, the 'atman' or pure self for the 'yogi' or the man absorbed in meditation, and 'Bhagavan' or Personal God for the 'Bhakta' or the man of devotion. Just as the same water of the ocean is congealed into the form of ice by extreme cold and is dissolved into

9. Centenary Volume : op. cit., p. 260

10. *Ibid.*, p. 265

formless water by the heat of the sun, so reality takes on form and shape for the devotee but is formless for the 'Jnani' and the 'Yogi'. This means that the absolute reality may be formless or it may have forms, so that the worship of the forms of God has not less value and validity than the worship of the formless Brahman. Sri Ramakrishna often used to illustrate the truth that God may be formless and yet may have forms by the story of the chameleon which wears different colours at different times and sometimes has no colour at all".¹¹

Thirdly, that Brahman is present everywhere and in everything we see in this world, both animate and inanimate. The oneness of all existence was a living experience. Echoing his master's voice Vivekananda also explained that "the world of objects is not totally negated in Brahman. It is not as in Sankara's Advaita it is, that Brahman alone is real and the world is false or illusory (Brahma satyam, jaganmithya), but that in a sense the world also is real".¹²

According to Swami Vivekananda, the Vedanta does not in reality denounce the world. What it seeks to teach is the deification of the world and its annihilation. It does not give us a suicidal advice to kill ourselves and annihilate the world. What is really intended by it is the deification of the world—giving up the world as we ordinarily think of it, as it appears to us—and to know what it really is. The Swami says : "Deify it (the world) ; it is God alone" ; and he cites the opening verse of the Isopanishad which says : "whatever exists in this Universe, is to be covered with Lord." He goes on further and says : "You can have your wife ; it does not mean that you are to abandon her, but that you are to see God in the wife. So also you are to see God in your children. So in everything. In life and in death, in happiness and in misery, the Lord is equally present. The whole world is full of the Lord. Open your eyes and see Him. This is what the Vedanta teaches"¹³

11. *Ibid.*, p. 266

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 267-9

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 269-70

A PRACTICAL VEDANTIN :

But the most distinctive feature of Swami Vivekananda's philosophy is that he applied his philosophic religious principles to the affairs of everyday life. He regarded Vedanta as a source and guiding principle of personal and collective life as well as a factor of civilization and "laid emphasis on the fact that we shall seek salvation, not so much in the traditional way, by renouncing the world and taking to the life of a recluse, as by serving the God in man. We have referred in the introductory chapter how this practical Vedanta was the foundation on which the whole structure of his monastic organization was built. Reference has also been made to the opposition of his own brother-disciples to this new mode of salvation propounded by Swami Vivekananda. He, however, not only stuck to his gun, but even went to the other extreme of denouncing every other form of salvation. His retort to his critics, that he would follow this path even if it goes against the teachings of Ramakrishna, indicates the depth of his feeling in the matter. The same spirit appears in a more pronounced form when he pours out his heart in a letter to Mary Hale on July 9, 1897 : 'Only one idea was burning in my brain—to start the machine for elevating the Indian masses, and that I have succeeded in doing to a certain extent.

"It would have made your heart glad to see how my boys are working in the midst of famine and disease and misery—nursing by the mat-bed of the cholera-stricken pariah and feeding the starving chandala, and the Lord sends help to me, to them, to all.....I feel my task is done—at most three or four years more of life are left. I have lost all wish for my salvation. I never wanted earthly enjoyments. I must see my machine in strong working order, and then, knowing for sure that I have put in a lever for the good of humanity, in India at least, which no power can drive back, I will sleep without caring what will be next.

"And may I be born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries, so that I may worship the only God that exists,

the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls. And above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the especial object of my worship".¹⁴

Now the question arises : How can there be any practical application of such an abstract philosophy as Vedanta ? Swami Vivekananda pointed out certain historical facts to prove that Vedanta was a practical philosophy in the past. Many of the Vedantic ideas emanated from persons who lived the busiest lives in the world, viz. the ruling monarchs of ancient India. The best parts of Vedanta were not the outcome of meditation in the forests only, but were thought out and expressed by brains which were busiest in the everyday affairs of life. Then there is that amazing fact before us that the Bhagavad Gita, which is the quintessence of Vedanta philosophy, was taught to Arjuna by Sri Krishna in the battle-field of Kurukshetra. All these things prove beyond doubt that Vedanta has a practical side and can be applied in day to day affairs of life.

The central idea of Vedanta philosophy is Oneness. "There are no two in anything, no two lives. There is but One life, One World, One Existence, everything is that One, the difference is in degree and not in kind".¹⁵ It is the same life that runs through all beings, from Brahma to the amoeba, the difference is only in the degree of manifestation. It is not correct to say that we live two lives, one religious and the other worldly. It is in the same life that we are religious and also engaged in ordinary worldly activities. If we believe in it, then the ideals of religion will more and more enter into all our thoughts and shape our practical conduct. "We should not also think that to make the ideal of the Vedanta practical means to drag the ideal down to the level of our life of blind passions and animal impulses. It is just the other way about. It really means that we are to make our

14. Majumdar, pp. 110-12

15. Swami Vivekananda, *Practical Vedanta*, p. 11

ordinary life conform to the ideal, to elevate it to the level of the ideal".¹⁶ As Swami said : "The actual should be reconciled to the ideal ; the present life should be made to coincide with life eternal".¹⁷ Therefore, the Vedanta should be carried into our everyday life, the city life, the country life, the national life, and the home life of every nation. A philosophy that cannot be put into practice, that cannot help man in this world is not of much use and value. Judged from this standpoint the philosophy of Vedanta is highly practical.

It teaches us to have faith in ourselves.¹⁸ And to talk of having faith in oneself is not an impossible and impracticable demand but rather a feasible and practical proposition. Faith in self means faith in all because all are One. "It is faith in universal self, the self that is in me, that is in you, that is in all...what is your self? Is it the clothes you put on? Certainly not? For clothes wear out and are cast off but you remain the same self. Is your self the body or the senses, the mind or the intellect, or even the ego? None of them. For these also constantly change and fluctuate, but you remain the same self. Your real self is the abiding and constant consciousness, the standing witness in you, which observes all changes in your body and mind, but is not involved in them, rather it stands above them. It is the pure immutable, unflickering light of consciousness in you, which is also pure existence and is ever free and blissful. You are that Sat-cit-ananda, not the small, miserable being that you ignorantly think yourself to be. Your self is the universal self that is one with all things and beings, that shines in the sun, the moon and the stars and illuminates them all. You are first to hear about this self and then constantly meditate on it. Think of yourself as the birthless, the deathless, the blissful, the omniscient, the omnipotent,

16. Centenary Memorial Volume, p. 278

17. Swami Vivekananda, Practical Vedanta, p. 11

18. "The new Vedanta teaches that he is an atheist who does not believe in himself."—Swami Vivekananda.

ever glorious soul'. Think on it day and night till the thought enters into your flesh and blood, and you have a vision of the Atman as Brahman. Here you realise your real self as none other than Brahman itself. With this realisation there comes a total transformation of your life and your activities. You live the Vedantic ideal, it becomes a matter of your practical life".¹⁹

Then the Vedanta teaches us to find God in our Self and worship Him. It asks us to see God in everything and as everything. The earth and the heaven, the sun and the moon, the fire and the water, the tree and the stone, the stars and the animals are all forms of Brahman. "The God of Vedanta is most known of all, and is not the outcome of imagination".²⁰ It is not the God in symbols and images that we find in temples. It is the God in the sick, the poor, the miserable, the ignorant, and the downtrodden that we have to worship. The Vedanta says : "He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased, really worships Shiva, and if he sees Shiva only in the image, his worship is but preliminary".²¹ What can be more practical than this ?

Another practical aspect of Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism is not mere tolerance but the acceptance of other forms of worship. It is the journey from truth to truth, from lower truth to higher truth. We should see others with eyes of love, with sympathy, knowing that they are going along the same path that we have trod. So the Advaita of Swami Vivekananda not only tolerates but accepts and respects other religions of the world as but different paths that lead to the same goal—God.

"Such is Swami Vivekananda's practical Vedanta, a living Vedanta, and not a dry and dead theory of the Vedanta. It is the Vedanta of the forests come back to our home, our city, and our society; it is the Vedanta entering into our ordinary life and conduct, it is the Vedanta that may inspire

19. Centenary Memorial Volume, pp. 278-9

20. Swami Vivekananda, Practical Vedanta, p. 26

21. Thus spoke Vivekananda, p. 42

our individual life, social life and national and international life. Swami Vivekananda wants us to carry the eternal message of the Vedanta to every door and to every corner of the world. It is this Vedanta that inspires the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and their vast and varied humanitarian activities. Let them go on for long till the whole world comes to realise the truth : 'Tat-tvam-asi', and is transformed into heaven".²²

DOCTRINE OF MEANS AND ENDS :

The ultimate end for Vivekananda was the good of all. He advocated that man must strive for this end even to the point of sacrificing himself. The means adopted to realise this ultimate end must also be worthy of that end. He did not believe in Machiavellian dictum that the end justifies the means. For him means and ends were inseparable. At Los Angels, on January 4, 1900, he said : "One of the greatest lessons I have learned in my life is to pay as much attention to the means of work as to its end. He was a great man from whom I learned it, and his own life was a practical demonstration of this great principle. I have been always learning great lessons from that one principle, and it appears to me that all the secret of success is there : to pay as much attention to the means as to the end.

"Our great defect in life is that we are so much drawn to the ideal, the goal is so much more enchanting, so much more alluring, so much bigger in our mental horizon, that we lose sight of the details altogether.

"But whenever failure comes, if we analyse it critically, in ninetynine percent of cases we shall find that it was because we did not pay attention to the means. Proper attention to the finishing, strengthening, of the means, is what we need. With the means, all right, the end must come. We forget that it is the cause that produces the effect : the effect cannot

come by itself; and unless the causes are exact, proper and powerful, the effect will not be produced. Once the ideal is chosen and the means determined, we may almost let go the ideal, because we are sure it will be there, when the means are perfected. When the cause is there, there is no more difficulty about the effect, the effect is bound to come. If we take care of the cause, the effect will take care of itself. The realisation of the ideal is the effect. The means are the cause: attention to the means, therefore is the great secret of life".²³

A SOCIOLOGIST :

Thus we find that Swami Vivekananda regarded the Vedanta as a rational explanation of the Universe and a world religion. He held that Vedanta had useful social implications. It taught faith in oneself, oneness of all living beings, and the divinity of man. It taught the secret of disinterested action. It could reconcile all religions and sects. It could serve the purpose of social and political reconstruction. He turned religion from theory to practice, from static mass of rituals to dynamic faith. In fact he socialised religion making it an instrument for social and national resurgence.

Among the many epistles which he wrote, one written to a certain Bengali woman-disciple is particularly important; as it gives glimpses of his ideas on society, liberty and the psychology of the religious consciousness. It reads in part as follows :

"Rishi, Muni or God—none has the power to force an institution on society. When the needs of the times press hard on it, society adopts certain customs for self-preservation. Rishies have only recorded those customs. As a man often resorts even to such means as are good for immediate self-protection but which are very injurious in the future, so

23. The Complete Works of Vivekananda, Vol. II., p. 11

also, society not infrequently saves itself for the time being, but these immediate means which contributed to its preservation turn out to be terrible in the long run.

"So if it be necessary to change any social custom, the necessity underlying it should be found out first of all; and by altering it, the custom will die of itself. Otherwise no good will be done by condemnation or praise."

"Now the question is: Is it for the good of the public at large that social rules are framed, or society is formed? Many reply to this in the affirmative; some again may hold that it is not so. Some men, being comparatively powerful, slowly bring all others under their control, and by stratagem, force, or adroitness, gain their own objects. If this be true, what can be the meaning of the statement, that there is danger in giving liberty to the ignorant? What, again, is the meaning of liberty?

"Liberty does not certainly mean the absence of obstacles, in the path of misappropriation of wealth etc., by you and me, but it is our natural right to be allowed to use our own body, intelligence or wealth according to our will, without doing any harm to others; and all the members of a society ought to have the same opportunity for obtaining wealth, education or knowledge. The second question is: Those who say that if the ignorant and the poor be given liberty, i.e., full right to their body, wealth, etc., and if their children have the same opportunity to better their condition and acquire knowledge like those of the rich and highly situated, they would be preserve—do they say this for the good of the society, or blinded by their selfishness? In England, too, I have heard, 'Who will serve us, if the lower classes get education?'

"For the luxury of a handful of the rich let millions of men and women remain submerged in the hell of want and abysmal depth of ignorance, for if they get wealth and education, society will be upset.

"Who constitute society? The millions, or you, I, and a few others of the upper classes?

"Again, even if the latter be true, what ground is there for our vanity that we lead others? Are we omniscient?

'Uddhared Atmana Atmanam'—'Raise self by self ! Let each one work out one's own salvation. It is freedom in every way, i.e. advance towards Mukti is the worthiest gain of man. To advance towards freedom—physical, mental and spiritual—and help others to do so is the supreme prize of man. Those social rules which stand in the way of the unfoldment of this freedom are injurious, and steps should be taken to destroy them speedily. Those institutions should be encouraged by which men advance in the path of freedom'.²⁴

This letter manifests the manysidedness of Swami Vivekananda's personality. It clearly reveals that he was as much a sociologist as a religious teacher.

BELIEVER IN MODERATION :

Like Aristotle, Vivekananda was a believer in moderation with regard to social change.²⁵ As it is clear from his letter, quoted above, he believed that social customs are the results of the arrangements of society for self-preservation. But if these regulations are perpetuated society may suffer decadence. Therefore, the way to do away with social regulations is not to destroy them violently but gradually to remove the forces which had necessitated the incorporation of the custom. In this way the social custom will die itself. Mere denunciation and condemnation create unnecessary social tension and antagonism and are not of much avail. Hence in place of cataclysmic radical changes Vivekananda stood for organic and slow reform.

24. Life of Swami Vivekananda: Eastern and Western Disciples: pp. 618-20

25. "Under the influence of this Neo-Vedantism associated to a large extent with the name of the late Swami Vivekananda, there has been at work or slow and silent process of the liberalisation of old social ideas."—B. C. Pal, "The Spirit of Indian Nationalism", p. 40

OPPOSED TO SOCIAL WESTERNIZATION :

Swami was opposed to social Westernization of India. In his opinion "social order is but the reflex of the Infinite Universal Motherhood",²⁶ and India should grow according to her traditions. "Vain is to attempt the lines of action that foreign societies have engrafted upon us : It is impossible. Glory unto God, that it is impossible, that we cannot be twisted and tortured into the shape of other nations. I do not condemn the institutions of other races ; they are good for them, but not for us. With other sciences, other institutions, and other traditions behind them, they have got their present system. We, with our traditions, with thousands of years of 'Karma' behind us, naturally can only follow our own bent, run in our own grooves, and that we shall have to do".²⁷

In spite of the sparkle and glitter of western civilization, in spite of all its polish and its marvellous manifestation of power, he found it useless. He called it as "Vanity of Vanities".²⁸

"In the first place", he said, "we cannot become Westerns ; therefore, imitating the Westerns is useless. Suppose you can imitate the Westerns, that moment you will die, you will have no more life in you. In the second place, it is impossible. A stream is taking its rise, away beyond where time began, flowing through millions of ages of human history ; do you mean to get hold of that stream, and push it back to its source, to a Himalayan glacier ? Even if that were practicable, it would not be possible for you to be Europeanised. If you find it is impossible for the European to throw off the few centuries of culture which there is in the West, do you think it is possible for you to throw off the culture of shining

26. The Complete Works : Vol. IV. p. 413

27. The Complete Works : Vol. III., pp. 219-20

28. Swami Vivekananda on India and her problems : Advaita Ashram, Almora, p. 105

scores of centuries? It cannot be".²⁹ "To Europeanise India is, therefore, an impossible and foolish task. Moreover, imitation is not civilisation. Imitation never makes for progress. It is verily the sign of awful degradation.

SYNTHESIS BETWEEN THE EAST AND THE WEST :

But Swami Vivekananda did not altogether discard the West. "The West", he said, "is groaning under the tyranny of the Shylocks, and the East is groaning under the tyranny of the priests; each must keep the other in the check. Do not think that one alone is to help the world".³⁰ He declared that the East required the knowledge of science and technology as much or as badly as the West needed the spiritual culture of the East. "Europe, the centre of the manifestation of material energy, will crumble into dust within fifty years, if she is not mindful to change her position, to shift her ground and make spirituality the basis of her life. And what will save Europe is the religion of Upanishads".³¹ Thus, he worked for a synthesis between Old and New—the East and the West.

THE PROGRAMME OF SOCIAL REGENERATION OF INDIA

Swami Vivekananda gave a long list of the causes responsible for India's degeneration. Chief among them were :

1. Absence of Sraddha.³²
2. Anglicised spirit.³³
3. Dishonesty.³⁴
4. Disregard for physical well-being etc.³⁵

29. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda : Vol. III., p. 172.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 158.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

32. Complete Works, Vol. III., p. 224.

33. " " " V., p. 288

34. " " " V., p. 84

35. " " " III., p. 149

5. Fall of Kshatra-spirit.³⁶
6. Fear-complex.³⁷
7. Lack of originality and enterprise.³⁸
8. Laziness,³⁹
9. Narrowness.⁴⁰
10. Neglect of Religion.⁴¹
11. Weakness.⁴²

He also suggested certain possible remedies which shall be discussed one by one.

1. Emancipation of Women.⁴³
2. Uplift of the masses.⁴⁴
3. Positive education.⁴⁵

(A) EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN :

Emancipation of women and uplift of the masses formed the two most important items in Swami Vivekananda's programme of social regeneration of India. He traced the downfall of Indian society to the continued neglect of women and masses. "In India there are two great evils", wrote he, "trampling on the women and grinding the poor through caste restrictions".⁴⁶ Therefore, "uplift of the women, the awakening of the masses must come first, and then only can any real good come about for the country".⁴⁷ If the women are raised, then their children will by their noble actions glorify

36. Complete Works, Vol. IV., p. 273

37. " " " VII., p. 169

38. " " " III., p. 90

39. " " " V., p. 298

40. " " " III., p. 269

41. " " " III. p. 167

42. " " " III., p. 224

43. " " " VI., p. 234

44. " " " III., p. 191

45. " " " V., p. 153

46. *Ibid.*, Vol. VI. p. 303

47. Centenary Volume : p. 400

the name of the country—then will culture, knowledge, power and devotion awaken in the country. All nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to the women. That country and that nation which do not respect the women have never become great, nor will ever be in future".⁴⁸ The principal reason why our race has so much degenerated is that we had no respect for women. Manu says : 'Yatra naryastu pujyanti ramante tatra devatah'—"The gods are pleased where the women are held in esteem". "We are horrible sinners, and our degradation is due to our calling women 'despicable Worms,' 'gateways to hell,' and so forth. Goodness gracious ! there is all the difference between heaven and hell !! 'yathatathyato arthan vyadadhat'—'He adjudges gifts according to the merits of the case'. Is the Lord to be hoodwinked by idle talk ? The Lord has said, 'Tvam stri tvam puman asi, Tvam Kumara uta va Kumari'—'Thou art the woman, thou art man, Thou art the boy and the girl as well', And we on our part are crying 'Duram apasara, re chandala'—'Be off, thou outcaste ! 'Kena esha nirmita nari mohini' etc.—'Who has made the bewitching woman'.⁴⁹

Here again Swami Vivekananda relied on the Vedanta philosophy of the divinity of man and therefore, also, of the equality of men and women. "When you will realise that all-illuminating truth of the Atman, then you will see that the idea of sex-discrimination has vanished altogether, then only will you look upon all women as the veritable manifestation of Brahman.⁵⁰

Vivekananda held Sita as an ideal woman. Still in India among women may be found such character, such spirit of service, such affection, compassion, contentment and reverence. He wrote : "In the West, the woman did not very often seem to me to be woman at all, they appeared to be quite the

48. Swami Vivekananda on India and her problems : p. 95

49. Swami Vivekananda : Our Women : Advaita Ashram, Almora, (II Ed. 1946) pp. 23-4

50. Centenary Volume : p. 402

replicas of man! Driving vehicles, drudging in offices, attending schools, doing professorial duties. In India alone the sight of feminine modesty and reserve soothes the eye! With such materials of great promise, you could not, alas, work out their uplift! You did not try to infuse the light of knowledge into them! for if they get the right sort of education, they may well turn out to be the ideal woman in the world".⁵¹

True emancipation, he declared for woman as well as for man, could come only through an intensification of one's spiritual awareness. The first condition of which, according to him, is liberty. Social tyranny should give place to social liberty. The second condition is education. "As an outcome of that education they will of themselves be able to know what is good for them and what is bad, and will spontaneously eschew the latter".⁵² "With.....education women will solve their own problems. They have all the time been trained in helpless, servile dependence on others, and so they are good only to weep at the slightest approach of a mishap or danger. Along with other things they should acquire the spirit of valour and heroism. In the present day it has become necessary for them also to learn self-defence. See how grand was the Queen of Jhansi".⁵³

(B) UPLIFT OF THE MASSES:

In India, the very birth place of Vedanta, the masses (poor peasants, weavers and workers) have been hypnotized for ages. "To touch them is pollution, to sit with them is pollution! Hopeless they were born; Hopeless they must remain! And the result is that they have been sinking, sinking, sinking and have come to the last stage to which a human being can come. For what country is there in the world where man has to sleep with the cattle?"⁵⁴

51. The Complete Works : Vol. VI. p. 446

52. Swami Vivekananda on India and her problems ; p. 96

53. Centenary Volume : p. 405

54. Swami Vivekananda on India and her problems : p. 65

Our aristocratic ancestors went on treading the common masses of our country under foot, till they became helpless. The poor, the low, the sinner in India have no friends, no help,—they cannot rise, try however they may. They sink lower and lower everyday, they feel the blows showered upon them by a cruel society, and they do not know from where the blows come.

Thoughtful people within the last few years have noted it, but unfortunately they hold Hinduism responsible for it. "No religion on earth preaches the dignity of humanity in such a lofty strain as Hinduism, and no religion on earth treads upon the necks of the poor and the low in such fashion as Hinduism".⁵⁵ To them, the only way of bettering the condition of the masses is by crushing Hinduism. But Vivekananda did not find fault in Hinduism. He wrote that "religion is not at fault, but it is the Pharisees and the Sadducees in Hinduism, hypocrites, who invent all sorts of engines of tyranny. Who reduced the 'bhangis' and the 'pariahs' to their present degraded condition ? Heartlessness in our behaviour and at the same time preaching wonderful Advaitism—is it not adding insult to injury ? You have the greatest religion which the world ever saw, and you feed the masses with stuff and nonsense. You have the perennial fountain flowing, and you give them ditch-water. Your graduate would not touch a low-caste man, but is ready to get out of him the money for his education".⁵⁶ Therefore, Hinduism is not at fault. On the other hand it teaches us that every being is only our own self multiplied. It is the want of practical application, the want of sympathy—the want of heart responsible for the downtrodden condition of the masses.

"Our modern reformers, "he wrote", are very busy about widow remarriage. Of course, I am a sympathiser in every reform, but the fate of a nation does not depend upon the

55. *Ibid*, p. 66

56. *Ibid.*, p. 67

number of the husbands their widows get, but upon the condition of the masses. Can you raise them? Can you give them back their lost individuality without making them lose their innate spiritual nature?"⁵⁷ "Travelling through many cities of Europe and observing in them the comforts and education of even the poor people, "Swami wrote, "there was brought to my mind the state of our own poor people and I used to shed tears. What made the difference? Education was the answer I got. Through education, faith in one's own self, and through faith in one's own self the inherent Brahman is waking up in them, while the Brahman in us is gradually becoming dormant"⁵⁸ So the remedy is the spread of education among the masses.

(C) POSITIVE EDUCATION :

To Swami Vivekananda, education is not the amount of information that is put into our brain and runs riot there, undigested, all our life. He held that we must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas. If we have assimilated five ideas and made them our life and character, we have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library. He criticised the existing system of education; because, "it is not a man-making education, it is merely and entirely a negative education. A negative education or any training that is based on negation, is worse than death. The child is taken to school, and the first thing he learns is that his father is a fool, the second thing that his grandfather is a lunatic, the third thing that all his teachers are hypocrites, the fourth, that all the sacred books are lies! By the time he is sixteen he is a mass of negation, lifeless and boneless. And the result is, that fifty years of such education has not produced one original man in the

57. *Ibid.*, p. 72

58. *Ibid.*, p. 68

three presidencies. Every man of originality that has been produced has been educated elsewhere, and not in this country, or they have gone to the old universities once more to cleanse themselves of superstitions".⁵⁹

"The training by which the current and expression of will are brought under control and become fruitful, is called, by Swami Vivekananda as, "Education".⁶⁰ It may be described as a "development of faculty, not an accumulation of words, or, as a training of individuals to will rightly and efficiently".⁶¹

He wrote, "by education I do not mean the present system, but something in the line of positive teaching. Merely book learning won't do. We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet. What we want are Western science coupled with Vedanta, 'brahmacharya' as the guiding motto, and also 'shraddha' and faith in one's own self".⁶²

"Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man. I look upon religion as the innermost core of education. Mind, I do not mean my own, or any one else's opinion about religion. Religion is as the rice and everything else, like the curries. Taking only curries causes indigestion, and so is the case with taking rice alone".⁶³

Vivekananda stressed the comprehensive nature of education. According to him, it should aim at the character building, physical culture, cultivation of arts, study of humanities with special reference to Indian culture, and scientific and technological training. He advocated "Gurukula system of Education". My idea of education is "Gurugriha-vasa." Without the personal life of the teacher there would be no education. One would live from his very boyhood with one

59. *Ibid.* p. 48

60. *Ibid.*, p. 50

61. *Ibid.*, p. 51

62. *Ibid.*, p. 51

63. *Complete Works*, Vol. IV ; 358f

whose character is like a blazing fire, and should have before him a living example of the highest teaching... The charge of imparting knowledge should again fall upon the shoulders of 'tyagis'.”⁶⁴

Purity, thirst for knowledge, perseverance, faith, humility, submission and veneration are some of the conditions which he laid as necessary for the taught. According to him, “without faith, humility, submission and veneration in our hearts towards the teacher, there cannot be any growth in us. In those countries which have neglected to keep up this kind of relation, the teacher has become a mere lecturer, the teacher expecting his five dollars and the person taught expecting his brain to be filled with the teacher's words and each going his own way after this much is done. The true teacher is he who can immediately come down to the level of the student, and transfer his soul to the student's soul and see through and understand through his mind”.⁶⁵ Such relationship between the teacher and his pupil is possible, according to Vivekananda only in 'Gurukula' system.

Regarding the education of women he laid special emphasis upon chastity and fearlessness. For women he conceived an ideal institution known as 'Math', with a school attached to it (Math), in which religious scriptures, literature, Sanskrit, grammar, and English should be taught. “Other matters,” said he, “such as sewing, culinary art, rules of domestic work, and upbringing of children will also be taught, while 'Japa', worship and meditation, etc., shall form an indispensable part of the teaching. The duty of the teaching in school ought to devolve in every respect on educated widows and 'brahmacharinins'. It is good to avoid in this country any association of men with women's schools”.⁶⁶

“After five or six years' training in this 'Math', the guardians of the girls may marry them. If deemed fit for

64. Swami Vivekananda on India and her problems, p. 57

65. *Ibid.*, p. 58

66. *Ibid.*, p. 100

'Yoga' and religious life, with the permission of their guardians they will be allowed to stay in this Math, taking the vow of celibacy. These celebrate nuns will in time be the teachers and preachers of the Math. In villages and towns they will open centres and strive for the spread of female education. Through such devout preachers of character there will be the real spread of female education in this country.....Spirituality, sacrifice and self-control will be the motto of the pupils of this Math, and servic or 'Seva-Dharma' the vow of their life.....If the life of the women of this country be moulded in such fashion, then only will there be the re-appearance of such ideal characters as Sita, Savitri and Gargi".⁶⁷

To uplift the masses, Swami considered, spiritual and secular education is necessary. He wrote: "We have to give them secular education. We have to follow the plan laid down by our ancestors, that is, to bring all the ideals slowly down among the masses. Raise them slowly up, raise them to equality. Impart...secular knowledge through religion".⁶⁸

The whole idea of education was summed up by Swami Vivekananda as "the manifestation of divinity in man."—"You cannot teach a child and more than you can grow a plant. All you can do is on the negative side—you can only help. You can take away the obstacles, but knowledge comes out of its own nature. Loosen the soil a little, so that it may come out easily. Put a hedge round it, see that it is not killed by anything, and there your work stops. You cannot do anything else. The rest is a manifestation from within its own nature".⁶⁹

67. *Ibid.*, p. 101

68. *Ibid.*, p. 71

69. Centenary Volume ; p. 474

CHAPTER V

STATE AND INDIVIDUAL

Like Hegel, Green or Bosanquet Swami Vivekananda did not propound any systematic theory of the state. But in the following pages an attempt has been made to present a view of the state according to Swami Vivekananda, by arranging, systematising and developing his ideas on the subject, as found in his lectures and writings.

A VIEW OF THE STATE :

The state is an object of quite conflicting definitions. Some define it as 'an organisation of one class dominating over the other classes'; others regard it as 'an organisation that transcends class and stands for the whole community.' Some interpret it as a 'power-system', others as a 'welfare-system.' Some view it entirely as 'a community organised for action under legal rules'. Some view it as no more than 'a mutual insurance society', others as 'the very texture of all our life'. To some 'state is a necessary evil', while to others, an evil which will be unnecessary some day. Some class the state as one in the order of 'corporations', and others think of it as indistinguishable from society itself. Some identify it with the nation, others regard nationality as incidental or unnecessary or even as a falsifying element which perverts the nature and function of the state.¹

Swami Vivekananda's view of state is somewhat similar to the last but one view, expressed in the above paragraph. He identified state with nation. He wanted to unite the people of India and restore the pristine glory of the nation. His view of the state is in logical corollary of Vedanta. The

1. MacIver : *The Modern State* ; Oxford, London ; pp. 3-4

goal of human life, according to Vedanta, is the attainment of a blissful state of mental and spiritual realization of the secret spiritual reality which the society cannot undertake to provide. Every individual will have to tread the path of spiritual discipline by himself. But man is a member of society and it must, therefore, create conditions conducive to spiritual development by minimising occasions for conflict and frustration, exploitation and injustice, and maximising opportunities for the exercise of the moral virtues. Among the many instruments which society uses to serve its purpose, the state is perhaps the most important and most powerful. The state with the help of society alone can foster and promote the common economic, intellectual and spiritual interests of the people. It is a means to an end. It can bring justice, leisure, fairplay, honesty and peace in society. Being only one of society's agents, the state cannot have interests other than the interests of the individuals who form the society.

THE INDIVIDUAL :

A state is composed of individuals, Vivekananda stressed that noble virtues should be cultivated by individuals to make the state virtuous. Without virtuous individuals it is futile to expect the state being great or prosperous. He wrote : "The basis of all systems, social or political rests upon the goodness of men. No nation is great or good because Parliament enacts this or that, but because its men are great and good".² Men are more valuable than all the wealth of the world. As men cannot be made virtuous by an Act of Parliament, the religion, therefore, is of deeper importance than politics, since it goes to the root, and deals with the essentials of conduct.³ By religion he meant the eternal life giving principles as taught by the Shrutis and not the mass of superstitions and local customs, which are mere

2. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda ; Vol. V. p. 192
 3. Swami Vivekananda on India and Her Problems ; pp. 39-40

accretions requiring a wedging out with a strong hand. Above all, he taught that the nation depends upon the qualities and character of its individual members. In the strength of the individuals lies the strength of the whole nation. So each individual he urged, if he desired the good of the state as a whole, should try, whatever might be his walk of life, to build character and acquire such virtues as courage, strength, and self-respect and hold fast to the national ideals of renunciation and service.⁴

To the people of India he taught the lessons of self-reliance and self-confidence. These two important lessons he had learnt from his own experience in Western countries with Eastern spirit.

(i) SELF-RELIANCE :

Swami Vivekananda believed that if Indians wanted to solve their problems and to take strides towards progress they would have to rely on themselves. To him, weakness was the chief cause of the miseries of Indian people. He said : "what our country now wants, are muscles of iron and nerves of steel, gigantic wills which nothing can resist, which can penetrate into the mysteries and the secrets of universe, and will accomplish their purpose in any fashion, even if it meant going down to the bottom of the ocean and meeting death face to face".⁵ He asked the youngmen to be strong. "Be strong, my young friends ; that is my advice to you. You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of the Gita".⁶

"Strength," Vivekananda declared, "is the medicine for the World's disease. Strength is the medicine which the poor must have when tyrannised over by the rich. Strength is the medicine that the ignorant must have when oppressed by the learned ; and it is the medicine that sinners must have

4. Tejasananda : pp. 79-80

5. India and Her Problems ; p. 41

6. To the Youth of India ; p. 91

when tyrannised over by other sinners".⁷ And Upanishads, according to him, are the great mine of strength. Therein lies the strength enough to invigorate whole world ; the whole world can be vivified, made strong and energised through them.⁸

To preach the gospel of strength, in Nineteenth century, to politically prostrate India was of great political significance. In his poem entitled 'To the Awakened India', he said :

"Resume thy march,
With gentle feet that would not break the
Peaceful rest, even of the roadside dust
That lies so low. Yet strong and steady,
Blissful, bold and free. Awakener, ever
Forward ! Speak thy stirring words.

* * *

And tell the World—
Awake, arise, and dream no more !
This is the land of dreams, where Karma
Weaves unthreaded garlands with our thoughts,
Of flowers sweet or noxious, and none
Has root or stem, being born in naught,
Which the softest breath of Truth drives back to
Primal nothingness. Be bold, and face
The Truth ! Be one with it ! Let visions cease,
Or, if you cannot, dream but truer dreams,
Which are Eternal Love and Service Free".⁹

(ii) SELF-CONFIDENCE :

But self-reliance could only arise when individuals develop confidence in themselves. Swami wanted the young men of India to drop their feeling of inferiority and to believe in themselves. He said, "Faith, Faith, Faith in ourselves,

7. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda ; Vol. II. p. 201

8. India and Her Problems ; p. 42

9. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda ; Vol. IV. pp. 387-

Faith, faith, faith in God—this is the secret of greatness."¹⁰ Faith and strength can shake history. History of the world is the history of few individuals who had faith in themselves. The faith calls out the inner divinity. The man who possesses self-confidence can do much, individually and socially. We fail only when we do not strive sufficiently to manifest infinite power. As soon as a man loses confidence in himself, he embraces death.

He asked the Indians that "if you have faith in all the three hundred and thirty millions of your mythological gods, and in all the gods which foreigners have now and again introduced into your midst, and still have no faith in yourself, there is no salvation for you. Have faith in yourselves, and stand up on that faith and be strong ; that is what we need. Why is it that we three hundred and thirty millions of people have been ruled for the last one thousand years by any and every handful of foreigners who chose to walk over our prostrate bodies ? Because they had faith in themselves and we had not".¹¹

Swami Vivekananda had correctly diagnosed that the degradation of India was due to the foreign rule which had given rise to loss of love for one's own country and culture. He knew that it was impossible to create among Indians the spirit of self-reliance and self-confidence without making them proud of their nation. He himself was proud of being an Indian. He wanted that his fellow countrymen should also acquire that sense of dignity. His ideal of patriotism and conception of nationalism have been discussed separately in the following chapter. Here it would be sufficient to mention that by preaching self-reliance and self-confidence, Vivekananda wanted to develop the personality of Indians.

INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM :

Freedom is the next important thing which he considered necessary for individual growth.¹² His theory of individual

10. *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 190

11. *Ibid.*, p. 190

12. "Liberty is the first condition of Growth."—To the youth of India, p. 95

freedom is very comprehensive. He believed that 'Samashti' in its constant motion represents the dominant quest for freedom. "Freedom is the motive of the Universe, freedom is goal. The laws of nature are the methods through which we are struggling to reach that freedom, under the guidance of Mother. This universal struggle for freedom attains its highest expression in man in the conscious desire to be free".¹³ He regarded freedom as the only condition of individual growth and declared that "freedom in all matters, i.e. advance towards Mukti, is the worthiest gain of man. To advance oneself towards freedom, physical, mental and spiritual, and help others to do so, is the supreme prize of man. Those social rules which stand in the way of the unfoldment of this freedom are injurious, and steps should be taken to destroy them speedily".¹⁴

In one word, Swami Vivekananda stood for the spiritual freedom of the individual. He wanted the emancipation of individual from the bonds and demands of Maya. But how this spiritual freedom could be attained?

Swami answered that it could be "attained by the three-fold means of—word, worship, and knowledge.

- (a) Work—Constant, unceasing effort to help others and love others.
- (b) Worship—consists in prayer, praise and meditation.
- (c) Knowledge—that follows meditation"¹⁵

But Vivekananda did not stop there. Along with the spiritual freedom he demanded the material or external freedom of man. He was a practical Vedantin, a Karma-Yogi. He was convinced that without material freedom, spiritual freedom is meaningless. Both are complementary. He said, "liberty does not certainly mean the absence of obstacles in the path of misappropriation of wealth, etc., by you and me, but it is our natural right to be allowed to use our own body, intelligence or wealth according to our will,

13. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda : Vol. V. p. 434

14. *Ibid.*, p. 142

15. *Ibid.*, p. 434

without doing any harm to others ; and all the members of a society ought to have the same opportunity for obtaining wealth, education or knowledge".¹⁶

He was a believer in the theory of natural rights. "He earnestly hoped that the freedom which dawned in America on July 4, 1776 would become universal in the world".¹⁷ In his poem "To the Fourth of July",¹⁸ he wrote :

"All hail to thee, thou Lord of Light !
A welcome new to thee, today,
O Sun ! Today thou sheddest Liberty !
Bethink thee how the world did wait,
And search for thee through time and clime.
* * * * *

Move on, O Lord, in thy resistless path !
Till thy high noon o'erspreads the world,
Till every land reflects thy light,
Till men and women, with uplifted head,
Behold their shackles broken, and
Know, in springing joy, their life renewed" !¹⁹

EQUALITY AND FRATERNITY :

But freedom is meaningless unless it is a monument erected on the edifice of equality. To vary the metaphor, it is only in the setting of equality, that true freedom can ever be enjoyed. In the days of 'Laissez-faire' this freedom was elevated to such a high pedestal that in its sacred name workers were sweated and starved and the State looked on while the poor had the freedom to remain poor and the rich had the freedom to become richer.²⁰ Vivekananda was a staunch supporter of equality. To him equality was the

16. *Ibid.*, p. 141

17. Varma : p. 126

18. It was sheer coincidence that he died also on 4th July (1902)

19. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda : Vol. V. p. 440

20. Chagla : The Individual and the State ; Asia, Bombay, (1961)

"way to freedom ; inequality the way to bondage. No man and no nation can attempt to gain physical freedom without physical equality, nor mental freedom without mental equality".²¹ "Ignorance, inequality and desire", according to him, "are the three causes of human misery, and each follows the other in inevitable union. Inequality is the bane of human nature the curse upon mankind, the root of all misery. This is a source of all bondage, physical, mental and spiritual."²² As already stated Vivekananda regarded equality as a way to individual freedom. He wanted that every individual should have the same rights and insisted upon freedom of thought and action in every way.²³

But he was aware that 'absolute equality is impossible.' It is against the law of nature. "Absolute equality, that which means a perfect balance of all the struggling forces in all the planes, can never be in this world. Before you attain that state, the world will have become quite unfit for any kind of life, and no one will be there. We find, therefore, that all these ideas...of absolute equality are not only impossible but also that, if we try to carry them out, they will lead us surely enough to the day of destruction.. we come into the world with unequal endowments ; we come as greater men or as lesser man, and there is no getting away from the pre-natally determined condition".²⁴

According to him, so long this world lasts, differentiation there will and must be, and the millennium of perfect equality will come only when a cycle of creation comes to an end. Yet, he realized that the idea of equality is a great motive power. Just as inequality is essential for creation itself, so the struggle to limit it is also essential. "If there were no struggle to become free and get back to God, there would be no creation either. It is the difference between these two

21. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda : Vol. IV. p. 328.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 329

23. *Ibid.*, p. 356

24. *Ibid.*, Vol. I. p. 113

forces that determines the nature of the motives of men. There will always be these motives to work, some tending towards bondage and others towards freedom."²⁵

Equality is one of the fundamental principles of Vedanta. "The idea that one man is born superior to another has no meaning in Vedanta ; that between two nations one is superior and other inferior has no meaning whatsoever. Put them in the same circumstances, and see whether the same intelligence comes out or not. Before that you have no right to say that one nation is superior to another. And as to spirituality, no privilege should be claimed there...There are no special messengers of God, never were, and never can be. All beings great or small, are equally manifestations of God, the difference is only in the manifestation".²⁶

None can be a Vedantist, and at the same time admit of privilege to anyone, either mental, physical, or spiritual ; absolutely no privilege for anyone. All knowledge is in every soul, even in the most ignorant ; he has not manifested it, but, perhaps, he has not had the opportunity, the environments were not, perhaps, suitable to him. When he gets the opportunity, he will manifest it.²⁷

He said : "Those of you who have studied the Gita will remember the memorable passages—'He who looks upon the learned Brahmin, upon the cow, the elephant, the dog, or the outcast with the same eye, he indeed is the sage and the wise man' ; 'Even in this life he has conquered relative existence whose mind is firmly fixed on this sameness, for all, and are pure, are said to be living in God'.²⁸ This is the gist of Vedantic morality. This is what is called in Vedanta attaining to freedom. The sign of approaching that freedom is more and more of this sameness and equality. In misery and happiness the same, in success and defeat the same—such a

25. *Ibid.*, p. 114

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 423-4

27. *Ibid.*, p. 423

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 425-6

mind is nearing that state of freedom.²⁹ According to Swami equality is an ideal. We should preserve it and hope that we shall attain it sometime, and strive for it.

Lastly, it should be remembered that Vivekananda was not enamoured of mere equality ; he also stood for cultural and spiritual fraternity. He said : "gradually we reach the idea of universal brotherhood by flinging down the walls of inequality".³⁰ "That is a grand idea we ought to remember. In every man, in every animal, however weak or wicked, great or small, resides the same omnipresent, omniscient soul. The difference is not in the soul, but in the manifestation. Between me and the smallest animal, the difference is only in manifestation, but as a principle he is the same as I am, he is my brother, he has the same soul as I have".³¹ This idea of universal brotherhood, preached by Swami Vivekananda, is of great political significance in modern times. It is the cornerstone of the Indian tradition, the chief content of the Indian national character.

THE SOCIALISTIC TENDENCY :

Vivekananda's too much stress on equality naturally poses a problem viz., whether he was a socialist ?

There is no gainsaying the fact that Vivekananda was well acquainted with the philosophy of social revolutionaries of the West. In the year 1900 he had a talk with Prince Kropotkin at Paris. He once used Karl Marx's oftquoted phrase : 'the poor are getting poorer and the rich are getting richer'. What is more important, he once declared that "I am a socialist".³²

But he neither accepted the theory of classless society nor did he subscribe to the theory of Materialistic Interpretation

29. *Ibid.*, p. 426

30. *Ibid.*, Vol. V. p. 197

31. *Ibid.*, Vol. III. p. 126

32. *Ibid.*, Vol. VI. p. 381

of History. Although he was opposed to prevailing caste-system, yet he did not advocate the abolition of Varna-vyavastha. He wanted to ennable it so that the lowest class may have the opportunity to rise to the highest. In Vivekananda's social and political philosophy based on Vedanta there could be no room for class-struggle. Vivekananda championed the cause of universal co-operation and not of dissension. It is true that his heart bled for the ignorant and the poor and Upliftment of the masses constituted the most important part of his programme of the social regeneration of India. Even then he could not be termed as a socialist in the specific sense of the term.

Socialism stands for the elimination of private enterprise. It aims to abolish the private ownership of the means of production and wants to socialise the productive energies of the nation in order to prevent exploitation of many by some and bring out a just distribution of national wealth. In general, socialism is an economic doctrine, but not a religion or theological dogma.

On the other hand religion is the backbone of Vivekananda's social and political philosophy. He said that before flooding India with socialistic ideas it is necessary to deluge it first with spiritual ideas. Swami Vivekananda was a socialist so far as he believed that adequate opportunities of growth should be given to all. In his own words : "I am a socialist not because I think it is a perfect system, but half a loaf is better than no bread. The other systems have been tried and found wanting. Let this one be tried—if for nothing else, for the novelty of the thing. A redistribution of pain and pleasure is better than always the same person having pains and pleasures. The yoke will be lifted from shoulder to shoulder by new system that is all. Let every dog have his day in this miserable world, so that after this experience of so-called happiness they may all come to the Lord and give up this vanity of a world and governments and all other botherations".³³

Therefore, to call him a socialist is not true. His greatest

33. *Ibid* ; pp. 381-2.

genius lies in anticipating the forces of world events. He prophesied that socialism of some form or the other was coming on the boards and that the Shudras would be the ruling class of the world in a not distant future. According to his theory: "Human society is in turn governed by the four castes—the priests, the soldiers, the traders and the labourers..... When this priest (Brahmin) rules, there is a tremendous exclusiveness on hereditary grounds ;.. Its glory is, that at this period is laid the foundation of sciences. The priests cultivate the mind, for through the mind they govern. The military (Kshatriya) rule is tyrannical and cruel, but they are not exclusive ; and during that period arts and social culture attain their height. The commercial (Vaishya) rule comes next. It is awful in its silent crushing and blood-sucking power. Its advantage is, as the trader himself goes everywhere, he is a good disseminator of ideas collected during the two previous states. They are still less exclusive than the military, but culture begins to decay. Last will come the labourer (Shudra) rule. Its advantages will be the distribution of physical comforts—its disadvantages. (perhaps) the lowering of culture. There will be a great distribution of ordinary education, but extraordinary geniuses will be less and less".³⁴

According to him the world is in the third epoch under the domination of Vaishyas. The fourth epoch will be under that of the Shudras (labourers). A time will come, when there will be the rising of the Shudras with their Shudra-hood and they will gain absolute supremacy in every society.

He further stated that "if it is possible to form a state in which the knowledge of the priest period, the culture of the military. The distributive spirit of the commercial and the ideal of equality of the last can all be kept intact, minus their evils, it will be an ideal state. But is it possible ?

"Yet the first three have had their day. Now is the time for the last—they must have it—none can resist it".³⁵

34. *Ibid.*, p. 380-1.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 381.

Today we see the fulfilment of his prophecy—in Russia, China (the very countries named by Swami Vivekananda) and in many other countries of the world.

Bhupendranath Datta writes that the Marxists will be surprised when they see that the ideas of Marx are embodied in the views of Swami Vivekananda. On the other hand, there are some authors who go to the other extreme of picturing Vivekananda as all but a Marxist or Socialist. Both these assertions are wrong. While condemning both these assertions Dr. Y. Chelysev, Director, Institute of Asian Studies, Moscow, writes : "Vivekananda's world outlook can be properly understood and evaluated when examining it in the inseparable connection with the entire economic, social, political and cultural life of India in his time. It reflects many of the contradictions inherent in the ideologists of the advanced Indian intelligentsia who took the road of struggle for national liberation but at that time still had no clear-cut and definite ideological foundation and philosophical basis. Vivekananda's place in the development of India's social thought can be properly understood only by considering it a logical development of the ideology of religious and social reformation started in the first half of the 19th century by Rammohan Roy. A one-sided appraisal of Vivekananda can thus lead to wrong conclusions and generalisations about the development of social thought in India at the threshold of the 19th and 20th centuries. In my opinion, a parallel could be drawn here with Leo Tolstoi. The world outlook of the great Russian writer was assessed differently in our country. It was only the writings of V. I. Lenin about Tolstoi, in which the contradictory nature of his views was revealed and the strong and the weak sides of his world outlook were examined, that laid the foundation for a genuinely scientific study of his immense heritage, of his intricate and contradictory views. It seems to me that for a proper understanding of the role and importance of Vivekananda it is necessary to ascertain the intricate inter-connection of traditions and innovation in his world outlook and all his activities. It goes without saying that Vivekananda must not be regarded merely as an

idealistic philosopher and religious mystic who tried to put up in opposition to the materialist scientific world outlook various religious philosophical dogmas of Hinduism. By his attempt to revive the ancient religious philosophical traditions and adapt religion to the requirements of the present age, Vivekananda objectively helped to popularise among the masses the ideas of liberation, and imparted to these ideas the nature of a sacred religious duty... His historical merit in my opinion, is that he was one of the first ideologists of the epoch of national awakening who openly and resolutely called for active struggle to remake society and to win independence. But his religious idealistic world outlook prevented him from properly understanding and appraising life around him".³⁶

OPPOSED TO UTILITARIANISM :

Swami Vivekananda was opposed to the doctrine of Utilitarianism. Utilitarianism was a synthesis of individualistic Epicureanism and the traditional empiricism of English ethics as modified by the French materialistic philosophers like Helvetius. It was adopted by Philosophical Radicals in England, chief among them was Bentham, who put forward a comprehensive programme of legal, economic and political reforms, and connected it with the principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Bentham believed that this principle should guide all private actions and public policies and was confident that it could be applied to all practical problems of politics. He thought that "Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of cause and effects, are fastened to their

³⁶ "The Great Humanist, Democrat and Patriot; an article written by Dr. Y. Chelysev: published in Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume, pp. 516-7

throne."³⁷ Since all human actions are guided by pain and pleasure, Bentham believed that a skilful legislator can guide and control human actions through these factors and thereby foster greatest happiness of the greatest number. But Bentham failed to present a consistent and clear-cut philosophy of Utilitarianism. His great disciple, John Stuart Mill, tried to systematise the philosophy of Utilitarianism by integrating his (Bentham's) ideas with those of Comte.

In the writings of social and political philosophers of India, such as Tilak, Gandhi and Aurobindo, we find ample criticism of Utilitarianism. "It appears that the opposition to Utilitarianism from an idealistic standpoint is one of the cardinal principles of modern Indian social and political philosophy".³⁸ Gandhi dubbed it as a heartless doctrine. Tilak, Aurobindo and Vivekananda did not find it spiritual. Vivekananda criticised the philosophy of Utilitarianism because he believed that without the acceptance of an ultimate spiritual being no sound and stable ethics can be built. He wrote :

"Utilitarian standards cannot explain the ethical relations of men, for, in the first place, we cannot derive any ethical laws from considerations of utility. Without the supernatural sanction, as it is called or the perception of the superconscious as I prefer to term it, there can be no ethics...In the second place, the basis of utility is too narrow".³⁹

Utilitarianism, he believed, amounts to selfishness and expediency and may finally lead to gross egoism, ethical nihilism and moral anarchy. He criticised Utilitarianism because according to him, "the highest goal of man is not the pursuit of pleasure, even if qualitatively differentiated as Mill postulates, but the attainment of a blissful state of mental and spiritual realiza-

37. J. Bentham : *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* : Chapter 1, para 1.

38. Varma : *Political Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo* ; Asia, Bombay (1960) : p. 324

39. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* ; Vol. II ; pp. 63-4

tion of the secret spiritual reality".⁴⁰ Moreover, the doctrine of utility is principally concerned with the happiness and welfare of the human beings only. Whereas Vivekananda wanted the happiness and welfare not of human beings alone but of all living beings.

SELF-GOVERNMENT :

There are many forms of Government—Monarchy, Aristocracy, Oligarchy, Democracy etc. Swami Vivekananda favoured democracy and condemned monarchy. He found monarchy incompatible with individual liberty. He said, "even if the kings be of as godlike nature as that of Yudhishtira, Ramchandra, Dharmashoka, or Akbar, under whose benign rule the people enjoyed safety and prosperity, and were looked after with paternal care by their rulers, the hand of him who is always fed by another gradually loses the power of taking the food to his mouth. His power of self-preservation can never become fully manifest, who is always protected in every respect by another".⁴¹ To him, monarchy jeopardises individual growth and brings destruction to the nation. He further wrote : "Being always governed by kings of godlike nature, to whom is left the whole duty of protecting and providing for the people, they (men) can never get any occasion for understanding the principles of self-government. Such a nation being entirely dependent on the king for everything and never caring to exert itself for the common good or for self-defence, becomes gradually destitute of inherent energy and strength. If this state of dependence and protection continues long, it becomes the cause of the destruction of the nation, and its ruin is not far to seek".⁴²

He also detested aristocracy. He called it as the tyranny of minority. He said, "the tyranny of a minority is the

40. Varma V. P. ; *op. cit.* ; p. 325

41. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda ; Vol. IV ; p. 441

42. *Ibid.*, p. 441

worst tyranny that the world ever sees. A few men who think that certain things are evil will not make a nation move ".⁴³

Vivekananda stood for the democratic form of government. He regarded self-government to be good government, for any country. But his good government is that government which gives ample opportunities for the moral, mental and material development to its individuals. Neither he favoured the parliamentary government of British model nor did he like the monopolistic presidential government of American pattern. He stood, in fact, for the spiritual democracy. A government based on the teachings of Upanishads. He concluded that, "when the government of a country is guided by codes of laws, enjoined by Shastras which are the outcome of knowledge inspired by the divine genius of great sages, such a government must lead to the unbroken welfare of the rich and the poor, the wise and the ignorant, the king and the subjectsalike."⁴⁴

Besides, he found democracy in complete conformity to Indian traditions. He said that "the voice of the ruled in the government of their land—which is the watchword of the modern Western world, and of which the last expression has been echoed with a thundering voice in the Declaration of the American Government, in the words, 'That the government of the people of this country must be by the people and for the good of the people'—cannot however be said to have been totally unrecognised in Ancient India".⁴⁵

Buddhistic literature and writings of the Chinese and Greek travellers substantiate Vivekananda's hypothesis. There is not even an iota of doubt about it, that the germs of self-government were at least present in the shape of village Panchayats in India. But the germs remained the germs for

43. To the Youth of India ; p. 61

44. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda : Vol. IV, p. 441-2

45. *Ibid.*, p. 442

many centuries ; the seeds though put in the ground could not sprout before the middle of the twentieth century. To conclude, Swami Vivekananda regarded self-government as a training school for individuals. Popular intelligence and virtue its most valuable results. Since it is based on the general principle of equality, it is likely to promote justice and love for the nation.

CHAPTER VI

NATIONALISM :

Vivekananda's writings and lectures have contributed a great deal to the strengthening of the moral foundations of Indian nationalism in theory and practice. He is acclaimed as the "spiritual father of Bengal nationalism. Both Lala Lajpat Rai and Subhas Chandra Bose have testified to the role of Vivekananda as the hero-prophet of Bengal nationalism. Vivekananda was the guest of Tilak in 1892 and he and Tilak had great regards for each other".¹

At a time when India was seized with apathy, inertia and despair, he thundered the gospel of patriotism. He urged people to be strong and united. Unity and strength were the political testaments of Vivekananda to the Indian nation. At a time when the Indian intelligentsia was busy imitating the customs and manners of the westerners, he proclaimed, "Be proud that thou art an Indian",² and that the West had to learn much from India. It will not be possible to understand the genesis of the Indian National Movement and the change in the tone of the political literature between 1904 to 1907 without having in our mind the teachings of Swami Vivekananda.

FAITH IN GREATNESS OF INDIA :

First of all comes his faith in greatness of India. Swami Vivekananda had invincible faith in greatness of India. He was confident that since "India had a glorious past, India will have a future certainly more majestic".³ He was proud

1. Varma V. P. : op. cit., p. 6

2. Selections from Swami Vivekananda : Advaita Ashram, Almora (III Ed. 1957) : p. 534

3. Datta, Bhupendranath : Swami Vivekananda : Patriot and Prophet ; Navabharat Publishers (1954), Calcutta p. 333

of being born in India. India was the sacred soil 'Punya Bhumi' to him. He said : "If there is any land on this earth that can lay claim to be the blessed Punya Bhumi, to be the land to which all souls on this earth must come to account for Karma.....the land where humanity has attained its highest towards gentleness, towards generosity, towards purity, towards calmness, above all, the land of introspection and of spirituality—it is India".⁴ we live".⁶

In other parts of the world civilisations have arisen, great ideas have emanated but always with the blast of war trumpets, and with the march of embattled cohorts. "Each idea had to be soaked in a deluge of blood ; each idea had to wade through the blood of millions of fellow-beings ; each word of power had to be followed by the groans of millions, by the wails of orphans, by the tears of widows."⁵ but India for thousands of years, has peacefully existed. "Here activity prevailed when even Greece did not exist, when Rome was not thought of, when the very fathers of modern Europeans lived in the forests and painted themselves blue. Even earlier, when history has no record, and tradition dares not peer into the gloom of that intense past, even from then until now, ideas after ideas have marched out from her, but every word has been spoken with a blessing behind it, and peace before it. We, of all nations of the world, have never been a conquering race, and that blessing is on our head, and therefore we live".⁶

He further said that "there was a time when at the sound of the march of big Greek battalions, the earth trembled. Vanished from off the face of the earth, with not even a tale left behind to tell, gone is that ancient land of Greeks. There was a time when the Roman Eagle floated over everything worth having in this world ; everywhere Rome's power was

4. Swami Vivekananda : *To the Youth of India* ; Advaita Ashrama, Almora (1963), p. 1

5. *Ibid.* pp. 2-3

6. *Ibid.*, p. 3

felt and pressed on the head of humanity ; the earth trembled at the name of Rome. But the capitoline Hill is a mass of ruins, the spider weaves its web where the Caesars ruled. There have been other nations equally glorious that have come and gone, living a few hours of exultant and of exuberant dominance, and of a wicked national life, and then vanishing like ripples on the face of the waters...But we live, and if 'Manu' come back today he would not be bewildered, and would not find himself in a foreign land. The same laws are here, laws adjusted and thought out through thousands and thousands of years ; customs the outcome of the acumen of ages and the experience of centuries, that seem to be eternal ; and as the days go by, as blow after blow of misfortune has been delivered upon them, they seem to have served one purpose only, that of making them stronger and more constant."⁷

Vivekananda believe that spiritually India has had been much more advanced than any other country of the world. Spiritual light is India's gift to the world. If there is any word in the English language to represent the gift of India to the world, if there is any word in the English language to express the effect which the literature of India produces upon mankind it is 'fascination'. "To many, Indian thought, Indian manners, Indian customs, Indian philosophy, Indian literature, are repulsive at the first sight, but let them preserve, let them read, let them become familiar with the great principles underlying these ideas, and it is ninety-nine to one that the charm will come over them, and fascination will be the result.⁸

The great principles underlying all this wonderful, infinite, ennobling, expansive view of man, God and the World have been produced in India. In India alone, man has not stood up to fight for a little tribe God, saying 'My God is true and Yours is not true' ; let us have a good fight over it. It

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4

8. *Ibid.*, p. 7

was only here that such ideas did not occur, as fighting for little Gods. These great underlying principles being based upon the eternal nature of man, are as potent today for working for the good of the human race, as they were thousands of years ago, and they will remain so, so long as this earth remains, so long as we are born as individuals and have to work out our own destiny by our individual power".⁹

Swami was of the view that the lessons of sympathy and toleration, India has to teach to the world. He said, "education has yet to be in the world, and civilisation—civilisation has begun nowhere yet, ninety-nine point nine percent of the human race are more or less savages, even now. We may read of these things in books, and we hear of toleration in religion and all that, but very little of it is there yet in the world ; take my experience for that : ninety-nine percent do not even think of it. There is tremendous religious persecution yet, in every country in which I have been and the same old objections are raised against learning anything new. The little toleration that is in the world, the little sympathy that is yet in the world, for religious thought, is practically here, in the land of the Aryas, and nowhere else. It is here that Indians build temples for Mohammedans and Christians ; nowhere else. If you go to other countries and ask Mohammedans, or people of other religions to build a temple for you, see how they will help. They will instead try to break down your temple and you too, if they can. The one great lesson, therefore, that the world wants most, that the world has yet to learn from India, is the idea, not only of toleration, but of sympathy".¹⁰

EMOTIONAL PATRIOTISM :

The thought of restoring the pristine glory of India was always an uppermost thought in the mind of Vivekananda. His famous disciple, sister Nivedita, who was his constant companion, has written : "Throughout those years, in which

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9

10. *Ibid.*, p. 12

I saw him almost daily, the thought of India was to him like the air he breathed".¹¹ He had tremendous love for the nation and was a patriot of patriots. People called him as the Patriot-Monk of India and thinkers as the "embodiment of emotional patriotism".¹² Because he had established almost a sense of identity—consciousness with the nation, its peoples and its historic ideals.

While addressing to his compatriots he gave vent to his own ideal of patriotism in the following stirring words : "They talk of Patriotism. I believe in patriotism, and I also have my own ideal of patriotism. Three things are necessary for great achievement. First feel from the heart... Feel, therefore, my would be reformers, my would be patriots ! Do you feel ? Do you feel that millions and millions of the descendants of Gods and of sages have become next-door neighbours to brutes ? Do you feel that millions are starving today, and millions have been starving for ages ? Do you feel that ignorance has come over the land as a dark cloud ? Does it make you restless ? Does it make you sleepless ? Has it gone into your blood, coursing through your veins, becoming consonant with your heart-beats ? Has it made you almost mad ? Are you seized with that one idea of the misery of ruin, and have you forgotten all about your name, your fame, your wives, your children, your property, even your own bodies ? Have you done that ? That is the first step to become a patriot, the very first step.

"Instead of spending your energies in frothy talk, have you found any way out, any practical solution, some help instead of condemnation, some sweet words to soothe their miseries, to bring them out this living death ?.. Yet, that is not all. Have you got the will to surmount mountain-high obstructions ? If the whole world stands against you, sword in hand, would you still dare to do what you think right ?.....

11. Quoted by Majumdar : op. cit., p. 119

12. Varma : p. 127

If you have these three things, each one of you will work miracles".¹³

Though an ardent patriot, Vivekananda did not, however, openly advocate the cause of India's political liberation. He could not do so on account of two reasons. First, he was a monk and did not want to get involved in the Vortex of legal and political controversies. He wrote in September, 1894 : "I am no politician or political agitator. I care only for the Spirit.... So you must warn the people that no political significance be ever attached falsely to any of my writings or sayings..... I have said a few harsh words in honest criticism of Christian Governments in general, but that does not mean that I care for, or have any connection with politics".¹⁴ Secondly, in those days the British imperialistic power in India was firmly entrenched. If Vivekananda would have openly advocated the cause of political autonomy he was sure to meet with imprisonment. That would have meant loss of his energy and detraction from the work that was dearest to his heart—the moral and religious regeneration of his countrymen".¹⁵ But although Swami Vivekananda did not openly advocate any protestant theory of Indian nationalism in opposition to British imperialism, he placed before his countrymen the ideal of political freedom in the garb of the emancipation of the poor and the downtrodden. To a group of youngmen, who met him at Dacca during his tour in 1901, he said : "Read Bankim Chandra and emulate his 'desabhakti' (patriotism) and 'Sanatan-dharma' (principles of the heroic band of Saranyasins as depicted in the Ananda-Math). Your duty should be service to motherland. India should be freed politically first".¹⁶ Referring to the policy followed by the Indian National Congress in those days, he told them, "That is not the way to build up Patriotism anywhere.

13. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda : Vol. III ; pp. 226-7

14. Eastern and Western Disciples : op. cit., p. 407

15. Varma : p. 127

16. Datta, Bhupendranath : p. 334

Beggar's bowl has no place in Banik's (merchant's) world of machine, mammon and merchandise. Everything has got to be controlled and directed by the invocation of human conscience, that is 'Mahamaya's' voice—the latent energy in man.....'First thing first' and body building and dare devilry are the primary concerns before the buoyant young Bengal".¹⁷

Then Vivekananda said, "India had a glorious past",¹⁸ and it will have a more majestic future. "The soul-stirring death-defying 'Mantram', 'Abhiih'—fearlessness will shake off age-long vestiges of slave-mentality, superstition and inferiority complex. In order to march boldly in equal pace side by side with other materially advanced nations of the world—ye, young Bengal, emulate the manly ways of Lakshmi Bai, the Rani of Jhansi, whose gallantry the English Commander has recognised—imitate the virtues of other nations, cultivate their technical skill and qualities of life..... And then, with a modern standard of morale and efficiency attained, pay them, the foreign usurpers, in their own coins in your own country to unfasten the alien octopus—hold on the citadel of Oriental culture. But know it for certain, mere imitation will lead you nowhere".¹⁹

In his lecture on the Future of India he pointed out that disunion and jealousy have been the greatest defects in our national life. We cannot unite, we do not love each other; we are utterly selfish, not three of us can come together without hating each other, without being jealous of each other. We lack the fellow feeling which is the secret of national greatness. Therefore, to restore the pristine glory of India, the whole secret lies in organisation, accumulation of power and co-ordination of wills. All this dissension must stop and instead of being jealous of each other and fighting each other we must worship our countrymen. He said : "For the next fifty years this alone shall be our keynote....Let all other vain gods

17. *Ibid*, p. 332

18. *Ibid.*, p. 333

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 333-4

disappear.....from our minds. This is the only God that is awake, our own race, everywhere his hands, everywhere his feet, everywhere his ears, he covers everything. All other gods are sleeping. What vain gods shall we go after and yet cannot worship the God that we see all round us—the Virat? When we have worshipped this, we shall be able to worship all other gods".²⁰ These are our Gods—men and animals—and the first gods we have to worship are our own countrymen.

SPIRITUAL NATIONALISM :

Urged by such an intense feeling of patriotism Swami Vivekananda worked to propound the foundations of a spiritual theory of nationalism which was later advocated by Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghosh. He wrote: "Race, religion, language, Government—all these together make a nation,"²¹ and in the interest of one's own nation is one's own interest; in the wellbeing of one's own nation is one's own wellbeing".²² Like Hegel he believed that this one all-dominating principle manifests itself in the life of each nation. Each nation has a peculiar *raison d'être*, each nation has a mission of its own to fulfil in the life of the world. The centre, the keynote of the whole music of the national life of India, her mission in the life of the world, has all along been religion. "Political greatness or military power is never the mission of our race; it never was, and, mark my words, it never will be. But there has been the other mission given to us, which is to conserve, to preserve, to accumulate, as it were into a dynamo, all the spiritual energy of the race, and that concentrated energy is to put forth in a deluge on the world, whenever circumstances are propitious".²³ He further stated, "Each nation has its own peculiar method of work. Some

20. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda; Vol. III, pp. 300-1

21. To the Youth of India: p. 113

22. The Complete Works: Vol. IV; pp. 471-2.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

work through politics, some through social reforms, some through other lines. With us religion is the only ground along which we can move. The Englishman can understand religion even through politics. Perhaps the American can understand religion even through social reforms. But the Hindu can understand even politics when it is given through religion ; sociology must come through religion, everything must come through religion. For that is the theme, the rest are the variations in the national life music".²⁴ And if any nation attempts to throw off its national vitality, the direction which has become its own through the transmission of centuries, that nation dies.

He believed, since religion had been the momentous guiding principle in India's history, religion alone, therefore, be made the backbone of Indian national life. He said : "In Europe, political ideas form the national unity. In Asia religious ideals form the national unity. The unity in religion, therefore, is absolutely necessary as the first condition of the future of India. There must be the recognition of one religion throughout the length and breadth of this land. What do I mean by one religion ? Not in the sense of one religion as held among the Christians, or the Mohammedans, or the Buddhists. We know that our sects, however varying their conclusions may be, however different their claims may be. So there are certain common grounds, and within their limitation this religion of ours admits of a marvellous variation, an infinite amount of liberty to think, and live our own lives".²⁵

He said, "this is the first step, and therefore it has to be taken".²⁶ We see how in Asia, and specially in India race difficulties, linguistic difficulties, social difficulties, national difficulties, all melt away before this unifying power of religion. We know that to the Indian mind there is nothing higher than the religious ideals, that this is the keynote of

24. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

Indian life, and we can only work in the line of least resistance. It is not only true, that the ideal of religion is the highest ideal; in the case of India it is the only possible means of work; work in any other line, without first strengthening this would be disastrous. Therefore the first plank in the making of a future India, the first step that is to be hewn out of that rock of ages, is this unification of religion.

According to Dr. Majumdar the ideal of nationalism preached by Swami Vivekananda was based on the four solid rocks of

- (i) The awakening of the masses who form the basis of the nation.
- (ii) Development of physical and moral strength.
- (iii) Unity based on common spiritual ideas.
- (iv) Consciousness of, and pride in, the ancient glory and greatness of India.

These were the four pillars on which, according to Swamiji, Indian nationality must rest, and it can be hardly denied that he was the first who clearly emphasised these ideas and directly contributed, perhaps more than anybody else, to sow the seeds of national development on this line".²⁷

Three facts are specially noteworthy here. First, at the time when Swami Vivekananda regarded the upliftment of the masses as the main item in the programme of national resurgence of India, not only the common Indian leaders, but even advanced national leaders like Bipin Chandra Pal, were scared by the very suggestion of the masses being drawn into politics, as that would lead to anarchy and revolution.²⁸ Secondly, when our politicians regarded meetings and petition to the British rulers as the only way of India's liberation, he raised his voice against it and termed it as policy of begging-bowl. Thirdly, he said that nations must help

27. Majumdar; p. 123.

28. Pal, Memoir's II, pp. 48-52.

themselves and must not depend on any foreign help".²⁹ In all these respects Swami Vivekananda anticipated the line of future political progress in India, which was to a very great extent the result of his own stirring exhortations.

NATIONALISM VIS-A-VIS INTERNATIONALISM :

But while Swami Vivekananda was an ardent patriot and a nationalist to the core of his heart, he did not shut himself up in the four walls of his country. His love for mankind knew no geographical bounds. He himself said, "my interests are international". He denounced exclusiveness and hatred and advocated the exchange of thought and inter-communication between India and other nations of the world. He pleaded for the harmony and good relationship of all nations and said that we must mix with all the races of the earth. But this internationalism of Swami Vivekananda was spiritual based on the Vedantic principle of universality of self.

It is indeed noteworthy that nearly seventy years ago he pointed out that social and political problems of the nation were assuming huge proportions, and could only be solved on broad international grounds. He said : "in politics and sociology, problems that were only national twenty years ago can no more be solved on national grounds only. They are assuming huge proportions, gigantic shapes. They can only be solved when looked at in the broader light of international grounds. International organisations, international combinations, international laws are the cry of the day. That shows the solidarity. In science, every day they are coming to a similar broad view of matter. You speak of matter, the whole universe as one mass, one ocean of matter, in which you and I, the sun and the moon, and everything else, are but the

29. Cf : "You must always remember that every nation must save itself ; so must every man do not look to others for help. You must not depend on any foreign help. Nations, like individuals, must help themselves."

names of different little whirlpools and nothing more. Mentally speaking it is one universal ocean of thought, in which you and I are similar little whirlpools, and as spirit it moveth not, it changeth not. It is the one Unchangeable, Unbroken, Homogeneous Atman."³⁰

He declared that there could be no peace or progress without the whole world being based on Truth and Justice. It is becoming every day clearer that the solution of any problem can never be attained on racial, national or narrow grounds. Every idea has to become broad till it covers the whole of the world ; every aspiration must go on increasing till it has engulfed the whole of humanity.

To sum up, his concept of nationalism vis-a-vis internationalism is dynamic and encourages people to be mingled with the life of other individuals and nations not only for the good of others, but also for their own well-being, progress and prosperity. In his memorable words :

"I am thoroughly convinced that no individual or nation can live by holding itself apart from the community of others, and wherever such an attempt has been made under false ideas of greatness, policy or holiness—the result has always been disastrous to the secluding one. The fact of our isolation from all the other nations of the world is the cause of our degeneration and its only remedy is getting back into the current of the rest of the world. Motion is the sign of life".³¹

30. To the Youth of India ; pp. 89-90

31. Quoted in : The Political Philosophy of B. R. Ambedkar : by Dr. D. R. Jatava. 1965, p. 59

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The Nineteenth Century began with a strong reforming enthusiasm in India under the inspiration and leadership of Raja Rammohan Roy. It was sustained and accelerated by the impact of European culture through the advance of English education. The Brahmo Samaj, which was the first outcome of the logical spirit of reform, soon outstripped all limits and ended by cutting itself adrift from the Hindu Society. Meanwhile, a large section of the English educated classes, dazzled by the splendour, power and progress of the European countries, rushed headlong to imbibe and imitate the European culture, beliefs and traditions, in which they found the key to all the ills, from which their society had been suffering. But the age-old Indian culture refused to surrender without a struggle. Soon there arose a class of the saviours of Indian culture, which vehemently denounced everything European or Western. The defenders of Indian culture declared that Indian culture could give the Indians all they needed and India had nothing to learn from the West even in the intellectual and material field.

Swami Vivekananda appeared on the scene when India was at the cross-roads of these two diametrically opposite ideals. His triumph at the Parliament of Religions in 1893 awakened a new sense of dignity and confidence among the people of India. Indians, for the first time, began to feel that they were superior to the Westerners at least in the sphere of philosophy and spiritual attainments. It was for the first time that the East began to shake off her feeling of inferiority. A new confidence began to take root in the minds of the people of India and they began to think in terms of equality with the West. They were no longer ashamed of being Indians or Asiatics or Easterners. He (Vivekananda) noticed that India had to find her way between the Scylla of old superstitious orthodoxy, and the Charybdis of materialism—

of Europeanism, of soullessness, of the so called reform—which had penetrated to the foundation of Western progress. Neither in Western materialism, nor in Eastern spiritualism, alone he found the road to salvation. He was the first to point out the defects in the respective cultures of West and the East and realised that the West required to learn Eastern religion and philosophy as much as the East required the benefits of Western materialism. He found that the East and the West were complementary to each other and without the synthesis of the two, humanity will be doomed. He, therefore, worked to amalgamate Eastern philosophy, religion and morals with the materialism of the West.

Swami Vivekananda was a practical Vedantin. He gave a new dynamic interpretation to the ideas of Vedanta for social and political purposes. To him, Vedanta was the only system of religion and philosophy which could not only stand the onslaughts of technology but could also give it a larger meaning. He refused to accept that Vedanta was theoretical and held that it was practical. He did not reconcile himself to the view of individual salvation when the rest of humanity groaned and sighed in misery and held that Vedanta could be practised in this world. In other words, he turned religion from a static mass of rituals to a dynamic faith, from theory to practice. He secularised and socialised religion, making it an instrument for social and political reawakening of the masses.

His philosophy can be summed up more distinctly in the following manner :

- (A) All religions are good. The same truths are found in every religion, and that the good and virtuous men have been produced by every creed. Therefore, it is needless to leave one's own religion to embrace another. People belonging to different religions of the world must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve their own individuality and grow according to the law of growth of their own religion. He pleaded for one universal religion, without any sect or creed, ritual or dogma, name or

stamp, and made it a foundation stone of Universal love and brotherhood.

(B) God is manifested in the whole world, in all living beings, in all incarnations. He is impersonal, unknowable and non-moral.

(C) Western civilisation is material, selfish and sensual. It is like a peal of laughter : but underneath it is a wail. It ends in a sob. The fun and frivolity are all on the surface but in reality it is full of tragic intensity and its influence is most seriously degrading to the Hindu society. Hindu civilization, since it springs from the oldest and noblest of religions, is virtuous and spiritual in every part. All the criticism of foreign scholars is erroneous and everything that missionaries say on the subject is wickedly slanderous. Every particle of Hinduism is valuable and must be retained.

(D) India is a spiritual nation. Therefore, social reform has to be preached in India by showing how much more spiritual a life the new system will bring, and politics has to be preached by showing how much it will improve the one thing that the nation wants—its spirituality. So every improvement in India requires first of all an upheaval in religion. Before flooding India with socialistic or political ideas the first work that demands our attention is that the most wonderful truths confined in our Upanishads, in our scriptures and Puranas, must be brought out and disseminated.

(E) Caste-distinction, trampling on the women, and poverty of the masses are the chief causes of the social and national degradation of India and any programme of reformation must aim at eradicating poverty, giving higher status to women and ennobling the caste-system.

(F) Socialisation of education, equal distribution and the teaching of Advaita (monism) can remove all the evils which are eating the vitals of Indian society.

Because the poor, the ignorant and the sinners all need the strength and nothing gives as much of strength as the idea of Advaita (monism). Education will ultimately create a strong public opinion resulting in suitable legislation; and equal distribution will lift the yoke from shoulder to shoulder.

Swami Vivekananda's contribution to Indian Renaissance is immensely rich. He laid the foundation of New India to be born in the twentieth century. His Neo-Vedantism spread like burning alcohol in the veins of intoxicated India. The new nationalist school which developed under the leadership of Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghosh had a common basis of thought in Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism. Vivekananda's message was adopted by Tilak, Pal and Aurobindo who paved the way to the rise of new nationalism in which religion, in its highest and purest form, played an important part. All of them were against Utilitarianism stressed spiritual freedom, nationalism synthesized with international orientations and incorporation of moral-spiritual values in the social and political structure. Tilak, Pal, Aurobindo, Swami Ramtirtha and almost all the great men of India in twentieth century were inspired by him. Some of the poems of Tagore indicate that he too was influenced by Swami Vivekananda's ideas of living and working among men, and serving the God through men. In his poem 'Apaman' Rabindranath Tagore denounces the attitude of Hindus towards the low castes almost in the same vehement language as was used by Swami Vivekananda. Tagore uses the word 'manusher narayana' corresponding to 'daridra narayana' of Swami Vivekananda. Subhas Chandra Bose recognised Swami as his spiritual teacher. Nehru showered endless encomiums on Vivekananda in his book 'The Discovery of India'.

Mahatma Gandhi was also deeply influenced by Vivekananda. He based his political activities on truth and non-violence, which are nothing but the essence of true religion. It was his appeal to the religious sentiments of the people which made the Indian National Congress a mass movement

and created the necessary sanction behind its demand for Swaraj. The passionate appeal of Vivekananda to the young men of India to move forward and dedicate their lives to the nation did not go waste. It awakened the sleeping Indian giant. If the generation that followed saw, three years after the death of Swami, the revolt of Bengal, the prelude to the great movement of Tilak and Gandhi; if India today has definitely taken part in the collective action of organised masses, it is due to the initial shock given by the mighty message of Swami Vivekananda. His 'Song of Sannyasin' is Bible of Bengal and his 'Lectures from Colombo to Almora' is the Gita of present age meant to rouse millions of Tamasic Arjunas to hard work and puissance.

Another great contribution of Swami Vivekananda is the setting up of the Ramakrishna Mission. The Mission remains faithful to the ideals of the Master even today. It has grown into a great institution and carries on social, educational and charitable activities. It conducts a large number of Maths and Ashrams and publishes a large number of books and journals in numerous languages. The education given in those Maths aims at creating the perfect man who combines in himself immense idealism and common sense.

Nevertheless, there are certain charges levelled against Swami Vivekananda, which may be enumerated as follows :—

- (A) There is a lack of adequate empirical substantiation in the philosophy of Vivekananda. The empirical political scientist of the West will not find in Vivekananda Aristotle's systematic treatment of the various forms of government and the causes of revolutions. He will miss here a quest for the methodological foundations of politics as in Thomas Hobbes. He will not discover any original theory of jurisprudence comparable to the system of Austin. He will fail to get a close analytical reasoning like that of Green into the bases of political obligation.
- (B) Vivekananda's writings are not marked by logical precision. There is an endless play with the words,

'Hindu Unity', 'Indian Nationalism', 'poverty', 'ignorance', and 'degradation'.

(C) Vivekananda's approach is somewhat negative. He criticises the West for materialism and the East for orthodoxy and advocates the synthesis of the two for the betterment of humanity. But he does not give us any clear cut programme of social and political regeneration.

(D) Swami presents a monistic view of the Universe but he believes in the pluralistic view of social life i.e. based on the four varnas. To monism, there is only one basal reality or truth in the Universe ; to pluralism, on the other hand, there are many realities which constitute the world. Vivekananda is, therefore, said to have failed to reconcile the social pluralism with metaphysical monism, i.e. social inequality based on caste-system and one ultimate reality.

But it may be remembered that Swami Vivekananda was not a social scientist or a lawyer. He was a saint and like Mazzini, a prophet of inspired nationalism. His greatness lay in a different direction. He was an intellectual prodigy and a great orator. He had a remarkable penetration both into the Vedantic scriptures and European philosophy. He did not merely repeat the sayings of ancient religious scriptures nor did he reiterate the formulas of Spencer, Mill, Hegel and Green but made an earnest endeavour to make an effective synthesis for Hindu spirituality and Western technology, of the ideas of Vedanta and the social realisations of the West. His chief merit lay in building a philosophy on the basis of the Eastern and the Western political idealism. He wanted to preserve the past of India by reconstructing it and it was in him that the Hindu renaissance reached a fuller, more self-conscious and adolescent stage. For years to come he will be revered as a great patriot, prophet and philosopher.

Swami Vivekananda was not a semanticist or a logician. As such it is idle to look for the analytical and verbal

subtlety, of a trained and perfect mathematical logician, in his writings. He was the prophet of a new nationalism in India and he wanted his message to be stressed even at the cost of repetition. The occasional use of the words like 'Hindu Unity', 'Indian nationalism', 'poverty', 'ignorance' etc., was perhaps natural with him who wanted to communicate his gospel to inspire the people.

Further, Vivekananda was positive and constructive in his philosophic approach. He knew both the East and the West well and, therefore, he was in the best position to build a positive synthetic philosophy of his own. He was the first person to point out that the East and the West were complementary and the West needed the spiritual truths of Vedanta as much as the East needed the knowledge of Western science and technology. Judged from the practical standpoint, though Vivekananda personally could not do much to work a radical reconstruction of Indian society, he awakened the soul of India and awakening the soul of a nation necessarily forms a part of social programme. Three years after his death the nationalist movement in India burst forth into a tempest and under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi the Indian National Congress made the uplift of the masses, an integral part of Vivekananda's programme, its chief object. Had Vivekananda lived long to see the great convulsion in this country his powerful feelings for the redemption of the exploited masses must have compelled him to advance personally in the direction of social and political reconstruction.

As regards the reconciliation between social pluralism and metaphysical monism, Vivekananda preached that all are equal in society and all are Hindus without any social gradation. Caste divisions exist in society and not in religion. Sannyasins have no caste distinctions. When a person belonging to the class of Brahmins or a person belonging to the Shudra class becomes a monk, he becomes the equal and caste distinctions cease to operate. According to him, caste is simply a social institution that developed in the country to solve some social problems. In short, in the empirical

world, certain distinctions are necessary and cannot be obliterated root and branch, but in the spiritual world of reality distinctions do not exist.

In the end it may be said that Swami Vivekananda was one of the makers of our political destiny. He had a clear vision of the future. He described very accurately the three successive stages in the history of the world dominated by the priests (Brahmins), the military (Kshatriya), and the merchants (Vaisyas) and then visualised the rise of the exploited labourers (Shudras). Something more he predicted "Yes ! the Sudras of the world will rise. And that is the dictate of Social Dynamic that is 'Sivam'. It is as clear as day-light that the entire Orient will have resurrection to build anew a human world. Lo ! the future greatness of China, and in the wake of it, of all the Asiatic nations....I can see, through the veil, the shadow of coming events of the world. By God's grace it has descended on me, this insight of mine, through years of close observation, study and travel that is 'Sadhana'. As the astronomers see the movements of the stars through telescope, likewise the movements of the world falls within the range of my vision. You take it from me, this rising of the Sudras will take first in Russia, and then in China ; India will rise next and will play a vital role in shaping the future world".¹

"Europe," he wrote in 1895, "is on the edge of a volcano. If the fire is not extinguished by a flood of spirituality, it will erupt".² And after nineteen years the fire actually erupted—World War I came. Swami also foretold that the world is about to see a revolution in thought more extensive and more powerful than that which was witnessed in the Renaissance of Greek Literature. This time India will be the torch-bearer. Today his predictions are coming to pass. Those who keep their eyes open, those who understand the workings in the minds of the different nations of the West, those who are thinkers and study the different nations, will

1. Swami Vivekananda : Patriot and Prophet ; pp. 334-5.

2. Vivekananda : A Biography ; pp. 163-4.

find the immense change that has been produced in the tone, in the procedure, in the methods, and in the literature of the world by this slow, incessant permeation of Indian thought.

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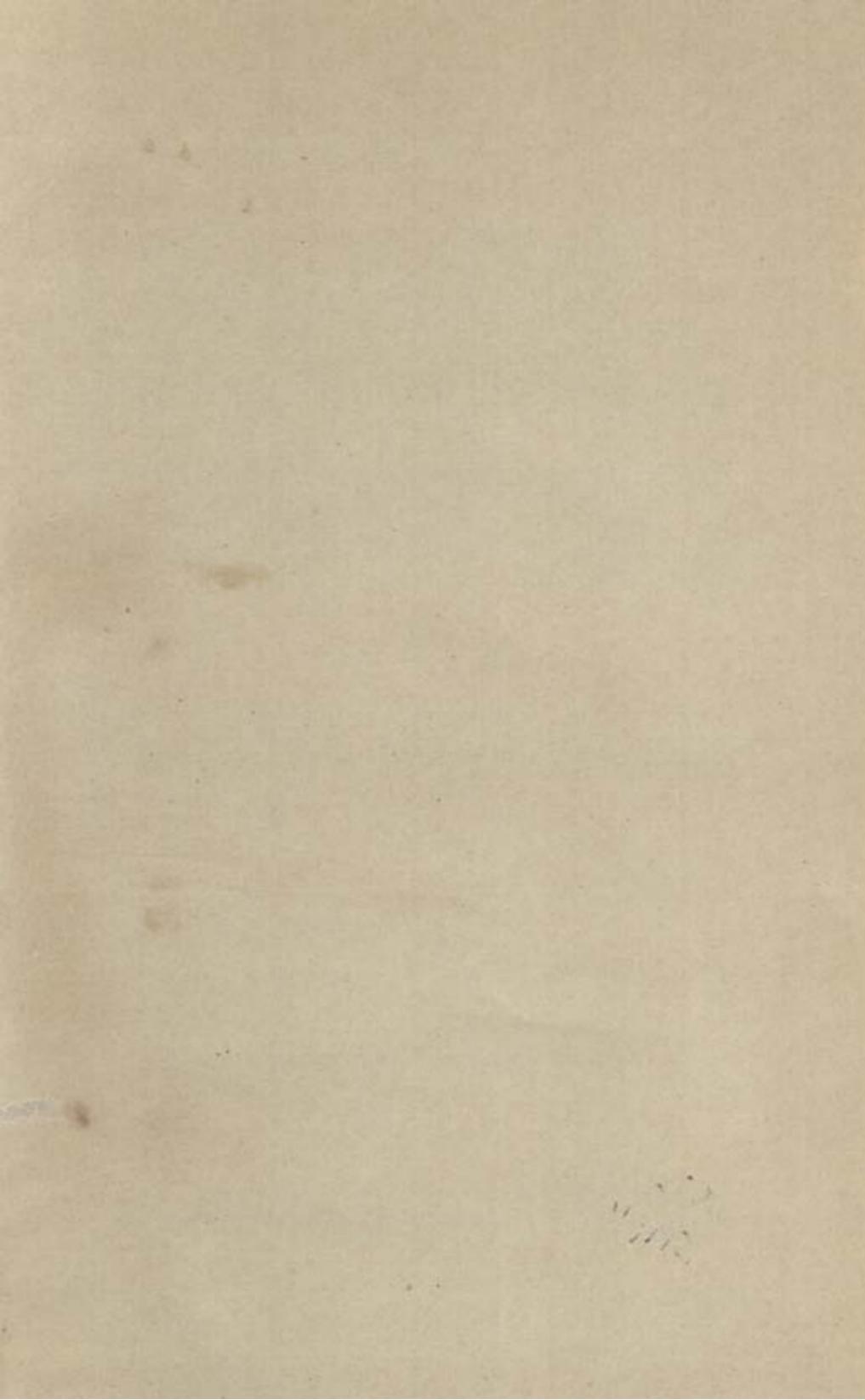
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